

U.S. retailers voice concerns about rising theft and flash rob attacks



New York, September 4 (RHC)-- U.S. retailers have voiced concern over an increase in thefts and violent incidents at their shops amid an ongoing cost-of-living crisis in the country. Media reports on Sunday named Walmart, Target, CVS, Walgreens, Home Depot, and Foot Locker, among other major U.S. stores, complaining about the increase in petty theft as well as organized mass theft referred to as “flash rob” attacks.

“Organized retail crime, and theft in general, is an increasingly serious issue impacting many retailers,” said Lauren Hobart, chief executive at Dick’s Sporting Goods during a conference call. U.S. retailers lost an estimated \$94.5 billion nationwide to “shrink” in 2021 alone, according to the National Retail Federation’s 2022 retail security survey. Shrink in retailers’ business means the loss of inventory from factors including staff theft, shoplifting, or administrative errors.

The nationwide survey also found that in 2021, U.S. retailers on average saw a significant rise in organized retail crime. As a result of the huge increase in organized retail crime, stores have been installing transparent walls with locks on shelves, sometimes padlocked chains on refrigerators, and scattering call buttons in aisles to summon the staff to serve customers.

In order to limit theft, unprotected shelves are often sparsely stocked, as well. However, retailers say such security measures are not always effective and many are considering closing shop.

A spokesman for the Giant company -- a U.S. regional supermarket chain that operates stores in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia and provides online shopping and delivery to New Jersey -- told AFP that the firm is mulling the closure of a Washington supermarket where theft and violence “is significant, and getting worse.”

Due to losses, Walgreens closed five San Francisco stores in 2021 and Walmart shuttered four Chicago outlets this year. “Shrink has increased a bit this year. It increased last year. It’s uneven across the country,” noted Walmart chief financial officer John Rainey in mid-August.

In the meantime, online users are reporting more “flash rob” incidents where a group surges into a store, commits flash robbery by seizing the items within reach, and then runs off.

U.S. luxury department store Nordstrom came under a mass looters’ attack in Los Angeles on August 12th. In that “flash rob” attack, around 30 masked people stole more than \$300,000 worth of luxury items, according to police reports.

Meanwhile, the years-long cost-of-living crisis, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, continues to squeeze American youth and other lower-income strata in US society who are constantly cash-strapped for necessities and always stuck in dire economic straits.

Tough working conditions with low wages amid the looming unemployment in the increasingly divided country with a vast income disparity have been a key source of discontent and frustration in the United States.

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