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Don't let thieves steal our Christmas

Paul Nicolaou



Sydney, let's take a stand against retail theft and recognise it isn't a victimless crime because it is damaging businesses and the economy.

And, as we also know, retailers are understandably worried about their employees having to deal with disturbing examples of customer abuse.

Business Sydney is calling for police to impose a pre-Christmas crackdown on shoplifting and other forms of retail crime.

We also think it's time to appoint a police unit dedicated specifically to combating retail theft and employee abuse.

As The Telegraph's "Stop Shop Abuse" campaign has identified, retail workers are too often facing verbal and physical abuse from customers who show no respect. It's a climate in which retail crime has become all too prevalent. A concerted police campaign to combat it and a separate investigative retail crime unit are essential, along with workplace protection orders to ban the worst offenders from retail premises.

Retail crime costs billions of dollars each year and ultimately we are all victims because it just drives up prices for everyone.

Statistics from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research tell the story.

Shoplifting in NSW has surged by 4.3 per cent and in Sydney the increase is even higher at 5.1 per cent. It's time to nip this trend in the bud before it gets worse. And that's why it is so important to act in time for the Christmas shopping rush. It's the time of year when retailers experience their highest foot traffic and sales but also their greatest exposure to theft and abuse.

Community confidence matters. Shoppers need to feel safe in busy precincts at Christmas.

It would be useful to see increased police visibility in major shopping centres and retail strips across Sydney.

This would also involve targeted patrols focusing on theft hotspots identified by retailers and business groups and collaboration with retailers to share intelligence and co-ordinate deterrence measures.

Public messaging needs to make clear that retail crime will not be tolerated. We must deter opportunistic theft and disrupt organised retail crime gangs.

It's time to take retail theft seriously. It would be a crime to do otherwise.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney