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SFPD Crackdown on Retail Theft Leads to 844 Arrests in 6 Months 26-109

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The San Francisco Police Department is expanding efforts to combat retail theft across the city with increased enforcement, training, and closer partnerships with retailers, leading to more arrests and a decrease in theft cases this year, Chief Derrick Lew announced Tuesday.

SFPD officers have made 844 arrests for retail theft in the last 6 months, an increase of 27% compared to the previous six months. In the past year, SFPD officers have recovered over $410,000 in stolen merchandise.

“It is incredibly frustrating to witness someone openly stealing from a business, and these crimes will never be tolerated in San Francisco. Retail theft harms our local retailers and negatively impacts our entire city,” Chief Lew said. “Our officers are doing tremendous work going after the individuals committing these crimes, and we plan to build on this effort by working more closely with our local businesses.”

SFPD's intensifying enforcement against Organized Retail Crime and retail theft has led to a nearly 20% decline in larceny cases so far this year in San Francisco. These crimes, however, remain far too common, and the SFPD is building on efforts to catch perpetrators and hold them accountable.

One area of focus has been on partnerships with local retailers. By building relationships with more local businesses, SFPD is conducting more blitz operations at retail establishments to immediately catch thieves. Additionally, SFPD's Organized Retail Crime (ORC) Task Force (with the Sheriff's Office and District Attorney's Office) has been working closely with loss prevention to preserve evidence in cases where SFPD does not make an immediate arrest.

For example, SFPD's ORC Task Force recently partnered with REI. This relationship resulted in officers identifying and arresting numerous habitual theft suspects, including three arrests in recent weeks.

Two weeks ago, SFPD officers arrested two suspects who stole over $1,600 in merchandise from a local Gap store. Officers worked with the retailer to obtain suspects descriptions and located the suspects a short time later. Both suspects were charged by the District Attorney's Office.

And in August, SFPD arrested habitual thief Lee Mitchell, who officers have arrested 16 previous times. In nearly every case, Mitchell uses a knife, pipe or other weapon to intimidate employees at a Walgreens in the Richmond District before stealing beer and other items.

SFPD's ORC Task Force recently launched a shadow program to train officers at district stations to effectively investigate retail theft cases. The program teaches patrol officers to build cases against suspects by collecting evidence, writing warrants and preparing cases for prosecution. These district station officers also act as liaisons between SFPD and individual businesses.

While holding thieves accountable has been a priority, SFPD officers have also been cracking down on individuals fencing stolen goods on city streets. In the past two months, SFPD officers have made nearly 100 arrests for fencing.

During "National Blitz Week" in August, SFPD's ORC Task Force and station officers arrested 19 individuals for theft and fencing throughout the city.

SFPD has been working closely with city leaders to address retail theft, including Mayor Daniel Lurie, who has made public safety his top priority.

“When we make it clear that stealing from stores is unacceptable in San Francisco, we make sure that people are safe and feel safe in our city,” said **Mayor Lurie**. “Retail theft puts workers at risk, raises prices for customers, and drives businesses out of our neighborhoods. That's why we are taking urgent action to stop it. SFPD’s stepped-up enforcement against organized retail crime has led to a nearly 20% decline in larceny cases so far this year. But we have more work to do, and I am grateful to Chief Lew, District Attorney Jenkins, President Mandelman, Supervisor Sherrill, and the officers and investigators of the San Francisco Police Department for continuing to move this work forward.”

“Retail theft is frustrating to San Francisco residents and can be devastating to small businesses, commercial corridors and the neighborhoods left behind when retailers retreat from high-theft locations.” said **District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman.** “We have seen progress over the last few years, but there’s still much more work to be done, and I am profoundly grateful for the Mayor’s focus on this issue.”

“While crime is down across San Francisco, retail theft continues to be a serious problem for our businesses and our neighborhoods,” said **District 2 Supervisor Stephen Sherrill.** “We need to be aggressive in addressing these crimes and make sure our grocery stores and other retailers can stay open, workers can do their jobs safely, and customers can have a great experience.”

SFPD’s partnership with District Attorney Brooke Jenkins has been instrumental in ensuring perpetrators are held accountable in the court of law. The District Attorney’s Office has assigned a vertical prosecutor to ORC cases, who works closely with SFPD investigators.

“Organized retail theft is not a victimless crime,” said **District Attorney Brooke Jenkins**. “When individuals steal from our retailers, those losses do not simply disappear – they are absorbed by businesses, employees, and the communities that depend on these stores. We will continue to stand with our business community and make clear that organized retail theft will not be tolerated. My office is proud to have received a grant from the State of California to strengthen our efforts to combat organized retail theft, and we are putting those resources to work. Working in partnership with the San Francisco Police Department and our law enforcement

partners, we will continue to investigate these crimes, hold offenders accountable, and prosecute organized retail theft cases."

Recent state laws have also given law enforcement more tools to hold perpetrators accountable. In 2024, voters passed Prop. 36, which created Penal Code 666.1. Under the law, offenses typically classified as misdemeanor petty theft or shoplifting can be prosecuted as felonies if the suspect has two or more prior convictions for qualifying theft-related offenses. As of Jan. 1, 2025, Penal Code 490.3 enables investigators and prosecutors to aggregate multiple petty thefts into a single felony charge of Penal Code 487 (a) once the total value exceeds $950.

Any business that would like to participate in an Organized Retail Crime operation can contact **sfpd.retailtheft@sfgov.org** or contact their district stations.

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