

“Black Friday” and Beyond

Keeping Your Store Employees and Customers Safe



The U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) recently sent letters to 14 of the nation’s largest retailers, encouraging them to take the necessary precautions to ensure employee safety during the holiday season, particularly during “Black Friday” sales events. Over the past few years, there have been a number of incidents involving serious injury—and even death—to customers and employees during the “Black Friday” period.

Marsh believes that the safety tips that OSHA has issued are relevant and meaningful to retail employers of all sizes who run in-store promotional sales, whether on “Black Friday”, during the holiday season, or at any time throughout the year.

Marsh Risk Consulting’s Workforce Strategies and Crisis Management teams have the resources, expertise, and experience to help retailers define their in-store loss control and safety program needs, design effective programs to meet those needs, and execute the programs at the store level. Among the safety tips recommended by OSHA that Marsh Risk Consulting is capable and qualified to assist retailers with are:

Planning

- Corporate should develop a written program outlining the requirements and guidelines of the company’s crowd control program. The program should be communicated to all locations, site-specific crowd control plans developed, and those plans reviewed by the corporate person in charge to affirm their quality.
- The site-specific plan should include a staffing plan that designates a location for each employee. Based on the size of the crowd expected, determine the number of employees needed in various locations to ensure the safety of the event (e.g., near the door entrance and throughout the store).
- The site-specific plan should also include an emergency plan that addresses potential dangers facing employees, including overcrowding, crowd crushing, being struck by the crowd, violent acts, and fire. This plan should also address how the location should communicate with customers and local authorities if there is an incident. Share this emergency plan with employees and all local public safety agencies.
- Ensure that employees are properly trained to manage the event and any potential emergencies. Designate an employee to communicate with customers and staff and contact local emergency responders, if necessary.
- Provide legible and visible signs that describe entrance locations, store opening times, and other important information such as the location of major sale items.
- Where large crowds are expected, consider hiring trained security or crowd management personnel or having police officers on site.

Pre-event Setup

- Set up barricades or rope lines for crowd management well in advance of customers arriving at the store, making sure that barricades are set up so that the customers' line does not start right at the entrance to the store.
- Designate employees to explain approach and entrance procedures to the arriving public and direct them to lines or entrances.
- Make sure outside personnel have radios or some other way to communicate with personnel inside the store and emergency responders.
- Consider using mechanisms such as numbered wristbands or tickets to provide the earlier-arriving customers with first access to sale items, as well as using an internet lottery for "hot" items.
- Communicate updated information to customers waiting in line. Distribute pamphlets showing the location of entrances, exits, and location of special sales items within the store.
- Shortly before opening, remind waiting crowds of the entrance process (i.e., limiting entry to small groups, redemption of numbered tickets, etc.).

During the Sales Event

- Make sure all employees and crowd control personnel are aware that the doors are about to open.
- Use a public address system or bullhorns to manage the entering crowd and to communicate information or problems.
- Position security or crowd managers to the sides of entering (or exiting) public—not in the center of their path.
- Provide crowd and entry management measures at all entrances, including the ones not being used. If possible, use more than one entrance.
- When the store reaches maximum occupancy, do not allow additional customers to enter until the occupancy level drops.
- Provide a safe entrance for people with disabilities.

Emergency Situations

- Do not restrict egress, and do not block or lock exit doors.
- Remain calm and provide customers or employees with assistance as needed.
- Know in advance who to call for emergency medical response.
- Keep first aid kits and Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) available, and have personnel trained in using AEDs and CPR on site.
- Instruct employees, in the event of an emergency, to follow instructions from authorized first responders, regardless of company rules.

The above points are just some of those noted by OSHA. The full version of OSHA's Fact Sheet containing "Crowd Management Safety Tips for Retailers" can be found at: https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/Crowd_Control.html

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