



Monday 21 August 2017

Joint action on annual \$1 billion retail crime problem

Almost \$1 billion of goods get stolen from shops in New Zealand every year and the University of Otago and Retail NZ want to do something about it.

A joint project has begun to more accurately calculate the value of stock that just walks out the doors of shops, despite sophisticated detection systems.

The huge annual loss to the New Zealand economy should spur the next government into action, say Director of the Otago Retail Studies Group in the School of Business, Dr John Guthrie, and Retail NZ General Manager for Public Affairs, Mr Greg Harford.

Dr Guthrie, who was also author of the last Survey of Retail Crime and Loss Prevention in 2003, says the level of retail crime in New Zealand has not reduced.

"International studies in the United States, Britain and Australia show similar trends. Overall it is estimated that the cost of retail crime is worth just under \$1 billion a year, and the new research project will help build an understanding of just how big the problem is and how retailers are tackling it.

"While detection systems have become more sophisticated, the cost of detection can be high, especially if the effect on retail crime is minimal.

"It may be that societal remedies are necessary, as well as focusing on police resourcing and penalties."

Mr Harford says the survey will add valuable information on retail

crime in the run-up to the 23 September election.

"Retail crime is very topical right now, given the increase of attacks on dairies and the increases in thefts from across the retail sector. Retail NZ, as an industry organisation representing more than 4,000 businesses, is very active working on crime issues and has made recommendations to the Government on options for addressing the problem.

"Political parties are starting to unveil their law-and-order policies ahead of the election, but we think retail crime needs special attention from the new Government.

"Getting up-to-date information on the retail crime picture will allow us to sit down with the new government and discuss practical solutions to the problem, including an infringement notice for low-level offending, a 'retail-crime taskforce' within the police, and a social-change programme to make it clear that retail crime is unacceptable," Mr Harford says.

Dr Guthrie says the online survey will be distributed to more than 4,200 retailers whose businesses collectively account for more than two-thirds of the country's total retail spending.

Questions will cover the cost of crime, its impacts on business and employees, and loss-prevention methods. The results of the survey are expected to be published towards the end of the year.

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