



# PROTECTING PATRONS DURING THE HOLIDAY SHOPPING SEASON



DEFEND TODAY,  
SECURE TOMORROW

## OVERVIEW

The ongoing implementation of safety measures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, including social distancing and the wearing of masks, have temporarily altered the operations of many retailers. These measures may unintentionally shift security risks within shopping venues. For example, many States have placed restrictions on the number of patrons allowed in stores; which, in some cases, has resulted in large waiting lines being created outside the venue—are these patrons at risk? Although there are no current credible or imminent threats, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) recommends that shopping venues re-assess security practices to ensure the most effective procedures are in place in relation to the current COVID-19 operating environment. This is particularly important during the holiday shopping season when an increased number of patrons is common.

## VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT & EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

To mitigate the impacts of a potential attack, shopping venues should first conduct a vulnerability assessment in order to identify and prioritize potential areas of concern that need to be addressed. In addition, shopping venues should develop emergency action plans that specify the steps employees will take following an incident; these plans should be coordinated with local law enforcement agencies to facilitate response if an incident occurs. Due to the unique nature of the current risk environment resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, shopping venues should also encourage stores and kiosks to increase communication and coordinate actions, where appropriate. Training and exercising these plans and actions will ensure effective response during an incident.

## SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR INDICATORS

Shopping venue employees should be trained to recognize and report suspicious behavior to their managers, security, or local law enforcement agencies. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) “If You See Something, Say Something®” campaign provides additional information on how to recognize and report indicators of terrorism-related suspicious activity.<sup>1</sup>

Suspicious behavior may include individual(s):



Placing an object or package, then abandoning it or leaving the area;



Inquiring about the operations and security of areas where large crowds gather;



Taking pictures/videos of personnel, facilities, and/or security features in an unusual or covert manner;



Carrying objects that may seem unusual for the surroundings;



Loitering at a location without a reasonable explanation;



Wearing unusually bulky clothing that is inconsistent with weather conditions that can conceal explosives/weapons;



Attempting to access sensitive or restricted areas;



Expressing or implying threats of violence.

The list above describes activities and behaviors that may be suspicious or indicative of criminal activity. Some activities may be constitutionally protected and should be reported only when there are articulable facts to support a rational conclusion that the behavior is suspicious. Do not report based solely on protected activities, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or a combination of only such factors.

<sup>1</sup> [dhs.gov/see-something-say-something](https://dhs.gov/see-something-say-something)



## PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Upon conducting a vulnerability assessment, shopping venues should consider implementing cost-effective protective measures that address identified areas of concern. In addition, shopping venues should consider:

- ✓ Contacting local fusion centers to understand the threat environment specific to the area;
- ✓ Coordinating with local law enforcement agencies to increase presence during peak shopping hours;
- ✓ Hiring additional temporary security staff, as necessary;
- ✓ Training non-security staff on basic life-saving procedures;
- ✓ Creating a crisis communication plan;
- ✓ Regularly patrolling parking areas;
- ✓ Ensuring parking areas and store fronts have adequate lighting;
- ✓ Placing signage describing COVID-19 procedures and security;
- ✓ Conducting a visual security sweep of the shopping venue before opening;
- ✓ Restricting vehicles near locations with increased pedestrians;
- ✓ Securing non-public entry points and checking them regularly;
- ✓ Limiting the number of people who can congregate near or that can line up immediately outside of stores;
- ✓ Frequently monitoring lines for suspicious behavior.

## IF AN INCIDENT OCCURS

Immediately call 9-1-1. Set the appropriate emergency action plan and/or crisis communication plan in motion. Every employee who has an emergency task should know how and when to perform it; this may include life-saving procedures. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's *You Are the Help until Help Arrives* curriculum and the DHS *Stop the Bleed* program teach life-saving first aid techniques that should be incorporated into planning efforts.

## AVAILABLE TRAINING AND RESOURCES

CISA provides access to a wide range of resources, training, and exercises to support risk mitigation efforts. These capabilities provide valuable security and resilience information; they also serve as entry points to many other resources.

**Securing Soft Targets and Crowded Places website** ([cisa.gov/securing-soft-targets-and-crowded-places](https://cisa.gov/securing-soft-targets-and-crowded-places)): Provides information regarding the types of threats posed to publicly accessible areas and resources with options for consideration to support risk mitigation activities.

**Employee Vigilance – Power of Hello** ([cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello](https://cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello)): Provides information on actions that may be taken when suspicious behavior is observed.

**Commercial Facilities Sector website** ([cisa.gov/cisa/commercial-facilities-resources](https://cisa.gov/cisa/commercial-facilities-resources)): Provides access to resources specifically geared towards commercial facilities.

**Protective Security Advisors Program** ([cisa.gov/protective-security-advisors](https://cisa.gov/protective-security-advisors)): Provides access to a cadre of more than 100 subject matter experts located across the country who conduct infrastructure security and vulnerability mitigation activities at the local level.

**Office for Bombing Prevention** ([cisa.gov/bombing-prevention-training-courses](https://cisa.gov/bombing-prevention-training-courses)): Provides training and resources to build counter-improvised explosive device capabilities and enhance awareness of related threats.

**Critical Infrastructure Exercises** ([cisa.gov/critical-infrastructure-exercises](https://cisa.gov/critical-infrastructure-exercises)): Provides resources for stakeholders to examine security plans and procedures through discussion- or operations-based exercises.

**Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team Complex Operating Environment – Shopping Malls** ([dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/jcat/firstresponderstoolbox/Complex-Operating-Environment–Shopping-Malls-2018.pdf](https://dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/jcat/firstresponderstoolbox/Complex-Operating-Environment–Shopping-Malls-2018.pdf)): Provides first responders with information on the complex operating environment of shopping malls; potential tactics, techniques, and procedures; security and response preparation; training; and resources.