

Washington: Stores selling liquor try to get a handle on shoplifters

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As shoppers pick up groceries at the West Seattle Thriftway, some are picking out their booze to buy along the way. But unfortunately there are some who steal the Stoli, and snatch the schnapps.

Some brands are so popular, the bottles had to be removed from the boxes and locked up.

"Patron is one that is a name brand that kids like to steal it," says Paul Kapioski, store owner. "They can resell it."

Kapioski says they catch about 10 shoplifters stealing hard alcohol a week.

Besides stationing a staffer near the liquor section at all times, the store has spent \$8,000 to \$10,000 on security tops and \$35,000 on a new security camera system.

"We have chimes that go off in the department here when someone comes into the department," says Kapioski. "We have gates that we lock up at the department at night."

He says the thieves get creative, sometimes working in teams. They'll even use the reusable shopping bags to hide the bottles as they walk out the door. Staff has seen the thieves range from teens to senior citizens.

But at a Safeway in Olympia, minors caught lifting the liquor made some statements and that made police take a closer look.

"They had made a comment that 'everybody is doing it,'" says Laura Wohl, spokesperson for Olympia police. "And that they were stealing the alcohol to sell to other students."

Last month, Olympia police arrested 4 minors for stealing liquor, compared to none for June the year before. They also caught 10 minors possessing hard alcohol last month compared to two for the same time last year.

Police say it's too early to tell if it's a trend or just a byproduct of the new access to alcohol.

"One of the things we want stores to be aware of when they see teens to keep an eye on them and when they're going to the hard alcohol section to be very aware of what they're doing there," said Wohl.