

ACS | best practice

PREVENTING FUEL THEFT

This guide aims to support petrol retailers across the country to do all they can to mitigate the risk of fuel theft and, when it does occur, respond appropriately by reporting incidents to the police and sharing intelligence.

An ACS best practice guide for retailers developed in association with the Home Office, the Petrol Retailers Association and the Downstream Fuel Association.

1. INTRODUCTION

Forecourt retailers face the same retail crime challenges as the rest of the convenience store industry, but they also have the added burden of fuel theft from their sites.

Fuel theft has been a long standing issue that forecourt retailers have successfully managed over a number of years.

They have worked with the police and installed numerous crime prevention mechanisms to reduce fuel theft.

Fuel theft is primarily made of two types offences:

Drive offs

Where the customer fills their vehicle up with fuel and drives straight off the forecourt not making an effort to pay. The police often refer to this as bilking.

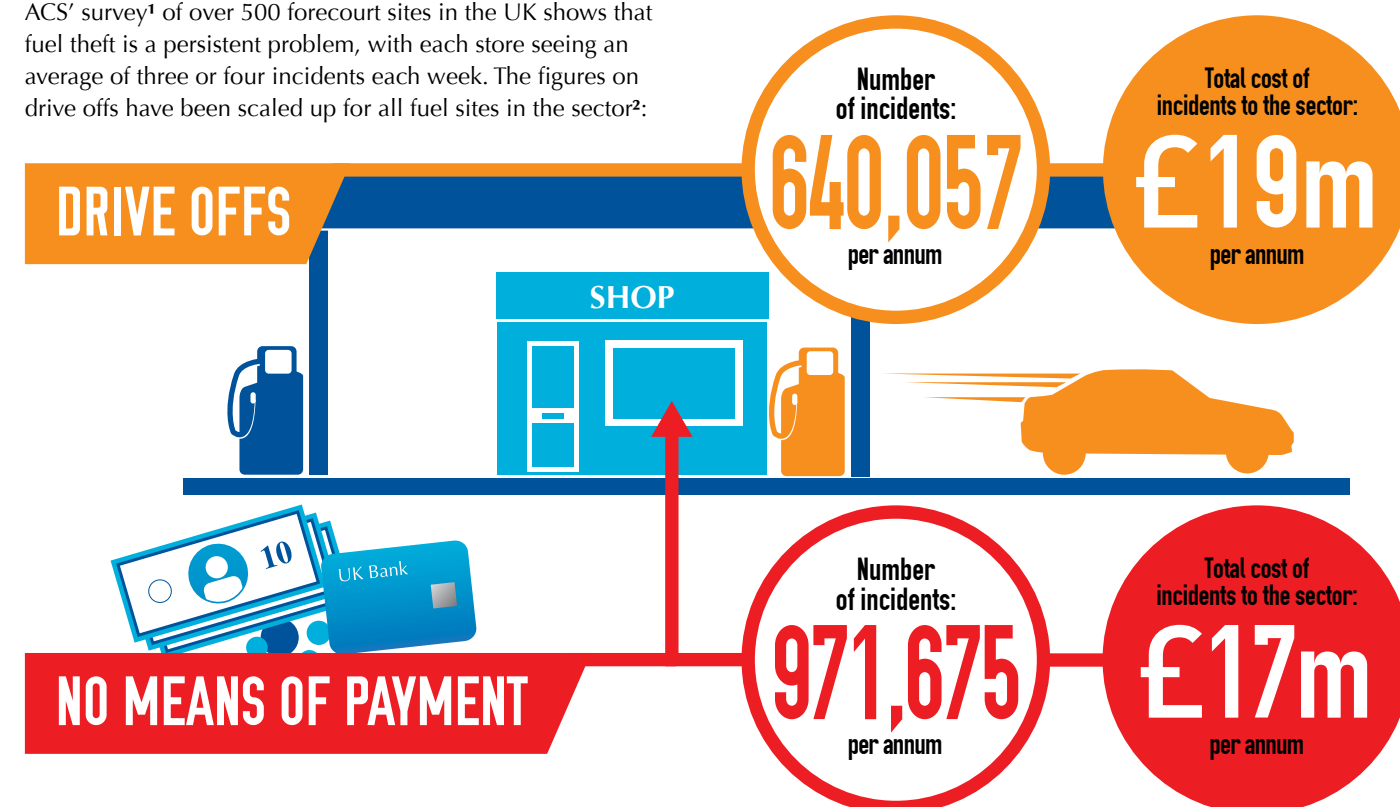
No means of payment

Where the customer fills their car up, goes to pay and claims they have forgotten their wallet/purse and cannot settle the bill. This may be genuine, but could be one of a number of offences by the same individual and can be classed as a criminal offence of fraud.

Additionally there is also the threat of bulk fuel theft from storage tanks.

2. FUEL THEFT STATISTICS

ACS' survey¹ of over 500 forecourt sites in the UK shows that fuel theft is a persistent problem, with each store seeing an average of three or four incidents each week. The figures on drive offs have been scaled up for all fuel sites in the sector²:



The high cost of fuel has been a driver of fuel theft, despite forecourt retailers' investment in a range of crime prevention measures. Many forecourt sites in the UK already have extensive CCTV coverage or automatic number plate recognition technology and train staff to prevent fuel theft.

Prevention of fuel theft is difficult and closer collaboration between police and forecourt retailers is needed to prevent fuel theft, or where it takes place, successfully detect and prosecute offenders.

¹ ACS Crime Report 2017

² IGD

3. PREVENTING DRIVE OFFS

Fuel thieves have three priorities when committing an offence which can often give them away; concealing their identity, concealing the identity of their vehicle and making a quick getaway.

Forecourt attendants should be conscious of these behaviours and when necessary not authorise the pump or use the tannoy system to deter offenders.

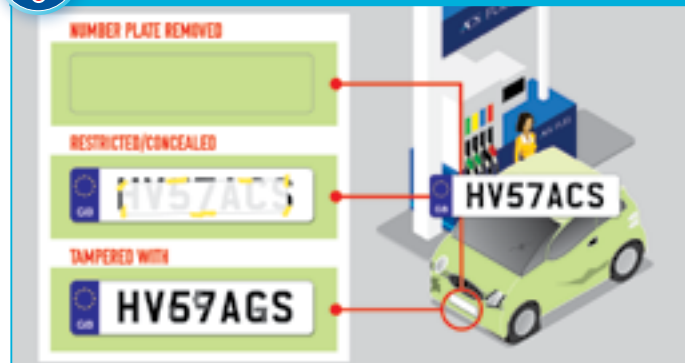
! CONCEALING IDENTITY



Look out for:

- Customers covering their face with a hood, hat or helmet.
- Customers concealing themselves behind their vehicle or pump.
- Customers using the pump furthest away from the store or nearest to the exit when others are available.

! VEHICLE IDENTITY



Look out for:

- Vehicles where the number plate has been removed, covered up, restricted or tampered with.
- Vehicles that are in a poor state of repair and look suspicious.

! QUICK GETAWAY



Look out for:

- Are any of the car doors open while the vehicle is being filled?
- Is the passenger filling the vehicle while the driver remains in the car?
- Are the lights on and is the engine still running?

✓ TOP TIPS

- Make eye contact with the customer.
- Use your tannoy; ask the customer to move to a different pump.
- Take your time to assess each vehicle.
- Do not authorise the pump.
- NEVER – give chase! Report the incident to the police immediately.
- RECORD evidence in detail and keep it safe

4. PREVENTING AND MANAGING NO MEANS OF PAYMENT

Sometimes customers genuinely forget to bring payment with them for fuel, but as long as you get the right information from them this should reduce the risk of non-payment. You should ensure you get the customer's: name, address and verify their car registration number.

Your no means of payment procedure and documentation should be well established amongst all staff and easily accessible from the till.

Follow these top tips for preventing and managing no means of payment:

✓ ALWAYS MENTION FUEL



Remember:

- Ask **ALL** customers at the till: **"Do you have any fuel?"**
- This prevents costumers from claiming they forgot to pay or weren't asked.

✓ GET CUSTOMERS ON CCTV



Remember:

- When the customer is giving their contact details to the retail assistant, for the contact details form; get their image on CCTV.
- This could help police enquires at a later date if they fail to return and pay or are a multiple offender.

✓ THINK ABOUT PAYDAY



Remember:

- Evidence suggests that no means of payment incidents are more likely to happen at the end of the month close to payday.
- For both drive offs and no means of payment attempts, offenders are more likely to try at night or during busy periods in the day.

5. VIOLENCE AND VERBAL ABUSE

Outlined below are the top three triggers for violence and aggression in-store. Managing and preventing these circumstances will help you and your staff avoid abuse in-store.



AGE RESTRICTED SALES - ABUSE AT THE TILL

Making sure that staff challenge customers for the sale of age restricted products such as alcohol and tobacco is imperative, but can often lead to confrontation.

Ensure that you have clear signage in-store explaining your policy and that staff enforce this consistently. Make sure that your staff are trained to manage difficult customers and can clearly explain your store policy.

REFUSING TO SERVE INTOXICATED PERSONS

Retailers are legally obligated to refuse an alcohol sale to an intoxicated person. One way to avoid personal abuse, is to make clear to the customer that it is not your decision, but the rules applied to your licence.



PREVENTING SHOP THEFT

In attempt to prevent shop theft offenders from fleeing the store, retailers can experience verbal abuse and violence from the offender.

Ensure that you put your own safety first. Keep a safe distance when engaging with potential shoplifters. Assess each individual situation on whether it is safe to make the confrontation.

TOP TIPS

1. Make sure your staff are aware of the triggers of abuse and are trained to deal with difficult customers.
2. Have a clear policy for reporting abuse by customers internally and externally to the police.

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6. OTHER INDUSTRY RESOURCES

ACS Crime Report

ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) represents 33,500 local shops across the UK and produces an annual Crime Report on crime in the convenience sector. The ACS Crime Report includes general crime prevention guidance for convenience store retailers including shop theft, violence and verbal abuse, robbery and burglary and working in partnership with the police.

For more information: www.acs.org.uk/research/crime-report/

Report fuel theft

What number to dial when calling the police following a bilking.

When a bilking or fraud has happened, and the offenders have driven off, the most appropriate number to dial will **usually be 101** which will connect to the local police, and **NOT 999**, as immediate police attendance to take crime details is not required.

In a genuine emergency call 999. A genuine emergency is where a crime or serious incident is in progress, where there is a serious risk of injury or a risk of serious damage to property.

Tackling Retail Crime Together

Tackling Retail Crime Together is a jointly managed website by the British Retail Consortium and Association of Convenience Stores bringing together best practice guidance from across the retail industry to prevent retail crime. The website includes case studies from retailers working closely with the police and the latest guidance and information from the Ministry of Justice and Home Office on anti-social behaviour powers, shop theft guidance and out of court disposal procedures.

For more information: www.tacklingretailcrimetoegether.co.uk

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