Retail Crime Reaching Crisis Levels Across Canada, Reinforcing Concerns Raised by BC Businesses: BIABC

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VANCOUVER, BC - The Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC) says newly released national retail crime data confirms what businesses and commercial districts across the province already know: retail crime is escalating in frequency, cost, and severity, with growing impacts on businesses, employees, customers, and community safety.

According to new data released by the Retail Council of Canada (RCC), retail crime losses in Canada have now surpassed $9 billion annually – more than double the level reported just over a decade ago. The report also highlights a 76% increase in violent incidents connected to retail theft and a continued rise in police-reported shoplifting incidents nationwide.

"These findings are not surprising to businesses across BC because they reflect what many owners, employees, and commercial districts are experiencing every single day," said Jeremy Heighton, BIABC President. "Retail crime is no longer viewed as isolated shoplifting incidents. Businesses are increasingly dealing with organized theft, repeat offenders, escalating aggression, and significant financial losses that are placing additional strain on already challenging operating conditions."

Earlier this year, BIABC released province-wide survey results that found nearly nine in ten businesses reported non-violent repeat crime had a moderate to very significant impact on their operations, while many businesses reported thousands – and in some cases tens of thousands of dollars in annual losses tied to theft, vandalism, break-ins, and chronic disorder.

According to the survey:

- Almost 90% of respondents say non-violent repeat crime has had a moderate to very significant impact on their business or commercial area.
- Nearly 40% of businesses report annual losses exceeding $5,000, with a significant share reporting losses in the tens of thousands of dollars directly attributable to repeat non-violent offenders.

A number of BIAs also provided further context about the level of persistent non-violent crime. As examples: In Kamloops, annual losses linked to this form of criminality exceeded $1 million in 2025, Downtown Victoria estimates graffiti removal alone cost $1 million last year, while Prince George estimates more than $4.2 million in downtown losses in 2025, including a single $2-million building. In the lower mainland, the Collingwood BIA spent $59,600 addressing non-violent crime in 2025 - rising to a projected $93,500 in 2026.

Among businesses that experienced crime in the past year, many reported to authorities only a fraction - or none - of the incidents. The most commonly cited reasons for not formally reporting include long response times, lack of follow-up, low confidence that incidents will be resolved or prosecuted, and the perception that reporting does not lead to meaningful outcomes.

"Businesses understand the complexities surrounding addiction, mental health, poverty, and repeat offending," Heighton added. "But there is also growing concern that the current environment is creating a perception that retail theft carries little consequence. That has real impacts – not only on businesses, but on frontline workers, consumer confidence, investment decisions, and the long-term health of commercial districts."

BIABC says businesses are calling for a more coordinated provincial and federal response focused on:

- stronger intervention targeting repeat offenders;
- improved coordination across policing, courts, and social services;
- more effective crime reporting and data collection systems;
- practical support measures that improve safety for workers and customers;
- and continued investment in public safety initiatives that support local commercial districts.

About BIABC

The Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) is the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout the province. Its members represent more than 80 business districts, employing hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office workers.

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