

# Alarm Systems at Entry and Exit Doors

*Prepared by Matthew Toellner – The Resilient Grocer Project*

## **Purpose of this Document**

This document is intended to evaluate the effectiveness and unintended consequences of alarm systems at store entry and exit doors, and to encourage a more thoughtful approach to their use. These systems should be used sparingly and only when there is a clear, demonstrated need. While intended to reduce theft, they often create more problems than they solve.

## **Unnecessary Stress and Trauma**

Alarm systems can create unnecessary stress for customers and employees. Sudden, loud noises may trigger anxiety or PTSD responses in some individuals, especially veterans, trauma survivors, and people with sensory sensitivities. Even for those without these concerns, the noise is jarring and unpleasant.

## **A Poor Customer Experience**

Alarms frequently create a poor customer experience. Customers are often rerouted through a different entrance or exit, sometimes after already reaching the door they intended to use. When an alarm is triggered accidentally, customers may feel embarrassed or singled out despite doing nothing wrong.

## **Little Evidence of Theft Prevention**

There is little evidence that these alarms meaningfully deter theft. Most theft is prevented through attentive staffing, visible customer service, clear sightlines, and strong front-end awareness. A loud alarm may draw attention, but it does not stop someone who is already determined to steal.

## **Alarm Fatigue**

Frequent alarms train employees to ignore them. When alarms go off regularly for non-emergency reasons, staff become desensitized and stop responding. Over time, the alarm loses its purpose and becomes part of the background noise of the store.

## **Strategic, Limited Use**

If alarms are considered necessary, they should be used unpredictably and only for limited periods. For example, alarms could be activated for one hour during a busy period once per day, or for several hours once per week. Similar to occasional bag checks, random ticket inspections, or highway speed traps, the possibility of the alarm being active may provide as much deterrence as the alarm itself, without creating a constant negative experience.

## **A Better Approach**

- Reserve alarms for genuine security concerns or after-hours use.
- Rely on visible customer service and front-end presence during business hours.
- Improve sightlines and staffing in vulnerable areas.
- Update store signage to better direct customers.
- Use attentive employees and strong front-end management as the primary theft deterrent.