

Opening and closing hours have become a trendy time for credit union robberies to take place. Limited staffing during these hours and lack of procedures is appealing to perpetrators.

While credit union robberies typically occur during office hours, a review of current opening and closing procedures to ensure proper plans are in place is critical.



Opening and Closing Procedures

All credit unions are exposed to robbery risks. Where there is money, there is often crime. In 2016 alone, the FBI reported nearly 4,200 financial institution robbery incidents.¹ Although traditional times (Fridays between 9 AM and 11 AM) remain the biggest threat, opening and closing times have become more popular.

Opening and closing hours are a targeted time for robbers due to ease of accessibility and far less people around to interfere. This ultimately provides perpetrators more time in the credit union with the ability to get more money. Your credit union is responsible for ensuring the safety of your employees and your members and these events can be even more traumatic. So, it is critical that your credit union has effective opening and closing procedures.

Robbers typically prepare by researching their surroundings and their targets, including routine actions that employees follow each day. The good news is there are action steps that can be implemented to make your credit union less attractive to a potential robber.

In 2016, nearly 4,200 financial institutions reported a robbery

At a Glance

- **Deterring Factors and Tips**
Use these tips to help minimize robbery risk.
- **Opening and Closing Procedures**
Review these procedures to ensure your operations and employees are set up for success.
- **Non-Traditional Branch Considerations**
Not all offices are the same. Use these tips for special circumstances.

Read on to learn more about emerging robbery risks during opening and closing hours.

Following strong practices – including thorough opening and closing procedures – can make your credit union less attractive to robbers.



Deterring Factors and Prevention Tips

Detailed Written Opening and Closing Procedures: Your written opening and closing procedures should include extensive detail. To best prepare your employees and reduce the possibility of attack, these policies should outline all necessary, actionable steps involved in opening and closing your branch. While you can use sample procedures to get started, it is vital that these procedures are uniquely defined for your credit union.

Formal Annual Training: A formal annual training session should be held to assist all employees in knowing what steps to follow in the case of security threats including opening and closing procedures. And, while written procedures are helpful, hands-on and interactive training for employees can provide great value.

Quarterly Employee Updates: Robbery training updates, at least quarterly, will ensure your new employees are brought up-to-speed on current procedures and serve as a refresher for existing employees. Quarterly training also allows you to review your current procedures and make adjustments based on emerging risks or operations changes throughout the year.

Branch Obstacles: Be certain you have adequate lighting and minimize obstructions both inside and outside of the branch. If possible, eliminate any dark areas, plants, or signs that provide good hiding spots. Also, consider keeping your office entrance lit – especially when employees arrive and leave for the day. Another option is to use sensors to insure lights come on when motion is detected or use timers to keep lights on past closing and before opening.

Ambush Code: An ambush code as part of the alarm system can minimize your risk. Your credit union should have an ambush code as part of the alarm system. Ambush codes allow an employee to appear to be disarming the alarm system, while actually sending a distress signal if they are confronted by a robber and forced to open the credit union.

All-Clear / Distress Signals: Develop internal and external all-clear signals and encourage staff to use after office opening inspection to show other employees that it is safe to enter. For example, an external signal could be having the blinds up and an internal signal could be moving the plant from teller station one to teller station two. Changing the signal at least quarterly is suggested.

Surveillance Testing: Periodically test video surveillance equipment to verify it is in proper working order. Outdoor video surveillance may need to be tested more frequently, due to weather, animals, or robbers disarming the equipment.

Interested in learning more about Opening & Closing Procedures and related risks?

Contact CUNA Mutual Group Risk Consultants at 800.637.2676 or riskconsultant@cunamutual.com

Opening and Closing Procedures

Because this can happen ...

Two employees routinely closed up the credit union branch and locked the external door prior to completing a final walk-through. After an employee locked the door, a perpetrator hiding on premise ambushed the employees. The perpetrator held the employees hostage for more than an hour while robbing the credit union.

Opening Procedures

- ☐ Require two people to arrive at the branch independently at the same time. Individuals should park away from each other but within view of the entrance. For credit unions without dedicated branch parking, consider using a meeting point.
- ☐ Have one employee drive around the building to ensure no one is hiding or loitering. If you're unable to drive around the building, go as far as you can or find a vantage point overlooking the credit union.
- ☐ Check for strange or unrecognized vehicles. In addition, look for potential signs of tampering or forced entry.
- ☐ Have one employee enter the branch, disarm the alarm system, and complete a walk-through while the second employee remains in their car watching for the external all-clear signal. The vault and/or safe alarms should remain armed.
- ☐ Post an internal and external all-clear signal upon a satisfactory inspection to show other employees it is safe to enter. At minimum, change the signals quarterly.
- ☐ If, after a predetermined time, the all-clear signal has not been set, has been set incorrectly or is determined not to be genuine, the employee in their car should call for assistance.
- ☐ Determine a safe meeting zone where employees should meet if they do not see the all-clear signals.

Closing Procedures

- ☐ Check to be sure all cash and valuables have been put away.
- ☐ Inspect the premises thoroughly to be certain that no unauthorized person is present at the end of the day. Closing walk-throughs are crucial, so be sure to check all floors, offices, restrooms, behind the teller counter, break room, elevators, stairwells, and any other place an individual may hide.
- ☐ Ensure all door, windows, vaults, and safes are securely locked.
- ☐ Activate the area, perimeter, and safe/vaults alarm.
- ☐ Require two individuals at closing. One employee should wait inside the credit union while the other employee goes to their car. They should close the windows, lock the car and start the car, and watch the remaining employee go to their car.
- ☐ When both employees are safely in their cars they can leave together.
- ☐ Limit phone activity during this time to avoid distractions and to stay completely aware.
- ☐ When driving home, be alert. It is important to be aware of suspicious activity and ensure no one is following.

If your credit union has an ATM foyer that has to be entered or exited as part of the opening or closing procedures, staff should wait until it is empty prior to initiating either procedure.

ON THE
HORIZON

New technologies continue to emerge, making opening and closing procedures more safe and secure. There are various controls that offer capabilities such as instant notification of security alarm deactivation, all-clear signals sent directly to phone, remote alarm activator, opening and closing instantaneous time tracker, and much more.



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Non-Traditional Branches and Special Circumstances

Of course not all branches are the same, and not all policies and procedures can apply from one branch to the next. Many credit union branches are part of a business, school, grocery store, hospital, etc, and special circumstances and different measures will need to be taken. It is important that you take procedures just as serious, if not more so, if your branch resides in a shared building. Here are some considerations for non-traditional branches.

- *Be aware of your surroundings and be looking for unfamiliar faces. Non-traditional branches are typically located in higher activity areas.*
- *Branches located within a building open 24/7, such as hospitals, should remain more alert. If opening/closing during employer staff transition times, be cautious of your surroundings. Watch for individuals that are focused specifically on your movements and actions.*
- *Determine an all-clear signal for one-person branches. Consider an email or text to another employee.*
- *Don't present yourself as a target by leaving the branch prior to opening hours. While it may be tempting to go next door to quickly grab a coffee, this routine can be easily spotted by a potential robber.*
- *Review the procedures and adapt them as needed to be conducive with your situation.*
- *Coordinate with sponsor groups how their operations can impact your policies and procedures.*



Be alert and remain vigilant

As a credit union employee, your job begins when you leave home in the morning and ends when you return home in the evening. While you may not be able to prevent a robbery, you can make yourself – and the credit union – a less inviting target by knowing your surroundings and following key procedures.

You can help maintain a safe work environment for yourself and your co-workers by remaining vigilant when opening and closing your credit union. Always, be alert to suspicious persons and maintain a record of persons or situations that don't seem to be connected with the credit union. Following well-thought out procedures can make your credit union a less attractive target for unwanted situations.

Insightful knowledge, experience, and resources when you need it most.

Contact CUNA Mutual Group's **Risk & Protection Response Center**
at **800.637.2676** or by email at riskconsultant@cunamutual.com for additional insights.

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