

3rd Annual New England Organized Retail Crime Symposium & Trade Show

On Thursday, September 10, 2009, the New England state retail associations jointly hosted the 3rd Annual New England Organized Retail Crime Symposium & Trade Show at the DCU Center in Worcester, MA. Kevin Plante, Manager of US Retail Loss Prevention Operations for Staples and RAM Loss Prevention Committee Chair, once again led the symposium as Master of Ceremonies. With over 300 people in attendance, a speaking panel of experts that are second to none, and exhibits from 23 vendors that are all outstanding in their class, the event provided an invaluable experience for all of the participants!

The goal of the symposium is to raise awareness in the retail industry of the growing problem of organized retail crime (ORC) while providing an opportunity for networking and information sharing. The day-long event brought together retailers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and policy makers to discuss the problem and ways to combat such criminal activities. Building off of successful events the last two years, we were once again able to update audience members on recent ORC studies, state and federal legislation, and lessons learned from industry leaders after another year of fighting this criminal activity.

Joe LaRocca, Senior Advisor of Asset Protection for the National Retail Federation (NRF), kicked off the event for the 3rd year in a row with an informative presentation that detailed the trends in ORC over the last year. His update included information from the recently released Law Enforcement Partnership Network (LERPnet) study on ORC incidents both nationwide and in New England.

A law enforcement panel addressed the lack of communication that often exists between law enforcement and retailers. While retailers and law enforcement have made significant strides to opening up those lines of communication through information sharing resources such as LERPnet, retailers are often left wondering what agencies they should contact regarding specific cases and how to best present case information to law enforcement. Lisa Palmieri, Intelligence Officer representing the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis assigned to the Commonwealth Fusion Center, delivered an outstanding presentation highlighting the Fusion Center's commitment to information sharing. Following Palmieri, Special Agent Daniel McCaffrey with the FBI's Violent Crime Branch gave exceptional advice on working ORC cases as well guidance on when and how to contact the FBI with ongoing investigations.

Event participants heard from retail experts in the afternoon. Kevin Foote from Staples gave invaluable advice on how retailers can successfully work an ORC case without having specific asset protection funds dedicated to combating ORC. Rosamaria Sostilio from Saks Fifth Avenue illustrated the challenges high end retailers face in fighting ORC and discussed the steps she has taken to overcome some of their many challenges. Finally, Walter Palmer from PCG Solutions highlighted the report that he and Chris Richardson published through ASIS (as part of their CRISP reports) surrounding ORC. Unlike other papers on the subject, this pointed out that there are more questions out there than answers. It highlighted some of the basic thoughts as well as some of the things that have been utilized in the industry to combat ORC, but there is a need for far more analyzing of the issue and scope.

The policy panel focused on both state and federal legislation. Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley discussed *An Act to Combat Economic Crime*. The bill, which was filed last month, specifically updates the law in three areas, including money laundering, enterprise crime, and wire interception. Attorney General Coakley explained how the enterprise crime portion of the legislation would be particularly useful in combating the growing problem of organized retail crime. Joe Rinzel, VP of Government Affairs for the Retail Industry Leader's Association (RILA), discussed federal legislation relating to organized retail crime and advised the audience on how to best advocate for the passage of these important bills.

The final speaker of the day was Kevin Tyrrell, National Program Manager for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Financial Programs/Cornerstone Unit. Tyrrell delivered an insightful presentation on the role ICE plays in ORC cases. Additionally, Tyrrell discussed the Cornerstone Private Industry Partnerships initiative and provided information on how attendees can become a private sector partner. Again, the importance of information sharing between retailers and law enforcement was prevalent in this presentation.

RAM would like to thank the other New England state retail associations for co-hosting the event, the 23 exhibitors that participated in the trade show, and all of our speakers and attendees for making this a successful event. Additionally, RAM would like to thank Kevin Plante (Staples), Brendan Fitzgerald (BJ's Wholesale Club), Charles Delgado (BJ's Wholesale Club) and RJ Gaites (Target) for being a part of our LP Committee Board and helping us put this event together. Lastly, this event would not have happened without the support of our sponsors – Target, GAP, TJX Companies, CVS, NRF, RILA, Macy's and BJ's Wholesale Club.