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H&M Staff Wear Body Cameras as Shoplifting and Violence Surge in UK Stores

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As theft and abuse escalate on the UK high street, fashion retailer H&M is joining a growing list of companies turning to technology for protection. The Swedish brand has begun trialling body-worn cameras for its staff in three locations, Edinburgh, Wood Green, and Beckton in London, as a way to help tackle rising levels of shoplifting and violence in stores.

Retailers across the UK have been sounding the alarm about what they say is a growing crisis. Shoplifting jumped by 20% last year, and incidents of abuse and violence towards shop workers are now estimated to exceed 2,000 per day, according to the British Retail Consortium. From verbal harassment to physical threats, frontline staff are increasingly bearing the brunt of the chaos.

“It’s about safety for our team and our customers,” said a spokesperson from H&M. “We’re testing body cameras as part of a broader approach that includes better staff training to help prevent situations from escalating.”

The cameras, which clip onto employees’ uniforms, can record interactions that turn aggressive or threatening. This footage can then be used as evidence if police intervention is needed, something retail leaders argue isn’t happening often enough. Many say they’ve been left to fend for themselves as police response to shoplifting incidents dwindles.

Retail giants like Tesco, Lidl, and the Co-operative Group have already equipped staff with similar bodycams in recent years, saying they were left with little choice. In some cases, criminals often operate in organised groups and brazenly steal in plain sight, knowing that staff are told not to intervene for their safety.

Some businesses are also investing in new anti-theft technology. From locking up everyday products like ham and pork to shifting high-risk items behind counters, stores are doing what they can to reduce losses. Greggs, for example, moved several food products behind the till in May in a bid to deter thieves.

A new national database, called Auror, is also being rolled out. Designed to be shared with police, it will store CCTV images and photos of repeat offenders, giving security teams a better chance of spotting and stopping known shoplifters.

The pressure is growing on the government and law enforcement to act. Labour has pledged to make assaulting a shop worker a specific criminal offence in England and Wales, as it already is in Scotland. Under the proposed law, offenders could face up to six months in prison.

Retailers are clear: they’re doing all they can, but they can’t fix this alone. As H&M’s trial begins, it’s yet another sign of how drastically the retail landscape is shifting and how urgently stronger protections are needed for those working on the frontlines.

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