The State of Retail Worker Safety

2023 SURVEY AND REPORT

MOTOROLA *SOLUTIONS*

The State of Retail Worker Safety

In the past year, brick-and-mortar retailers have seen more crime, violence and theft occurring within their stores and have been looking for ways to better respond to keep both their workers and their shoppers safe.

According to the National Retail Federation's (NRF) 2023 National Retail Security Survey, the number of violent shoplifting events rose by over one-third in the last year, with 88% of retailers saying that today's shoplifters are more aggressive than in the past.

It has been widely reported that the uptick in violence and theft has led retailers across the country to close stores or reduce hours to protect their employees. Organized retail crime, a multi-billion-dollar problem that involves groups descending on stores, stealing merchandise and listing items for sale on the black market via online auction and e-commerce sites, is becoming a global issue. Its impact has grown since the pandemic, as many stores struggle with staffing challenges and new regulations look to bar employees from engaging with perpetrators during incidents of theft.

To better understand how store employees feel about their safety, Motorola Solutions surveyed more than 1,000 retail associates and managers in the United States to determine their top concerns, the emergency protocols their stores have in place, current communication and technology tools used and the measures that could make them feel safer.
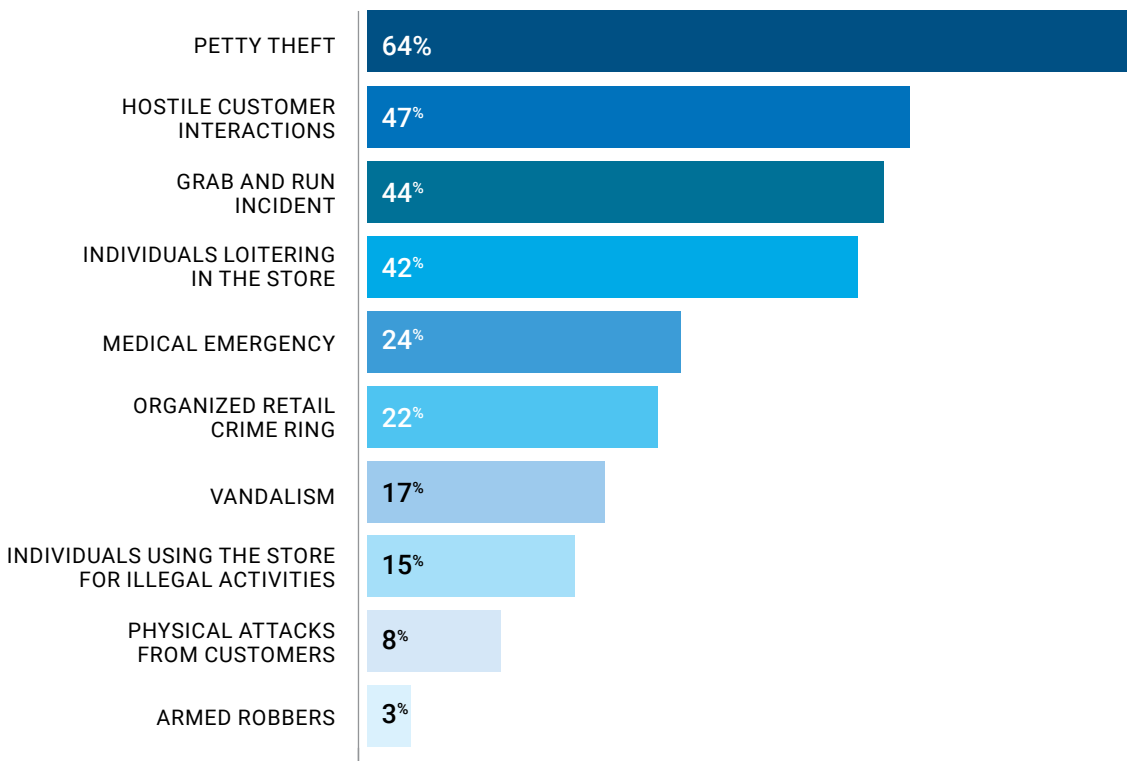
This research reflects the experiences and safety perceptions of everyday people working in the retail sector and can be used by industry leaders to usher in preparedness, communication and safety technology changes for the benefit of employees and shoppers alike.
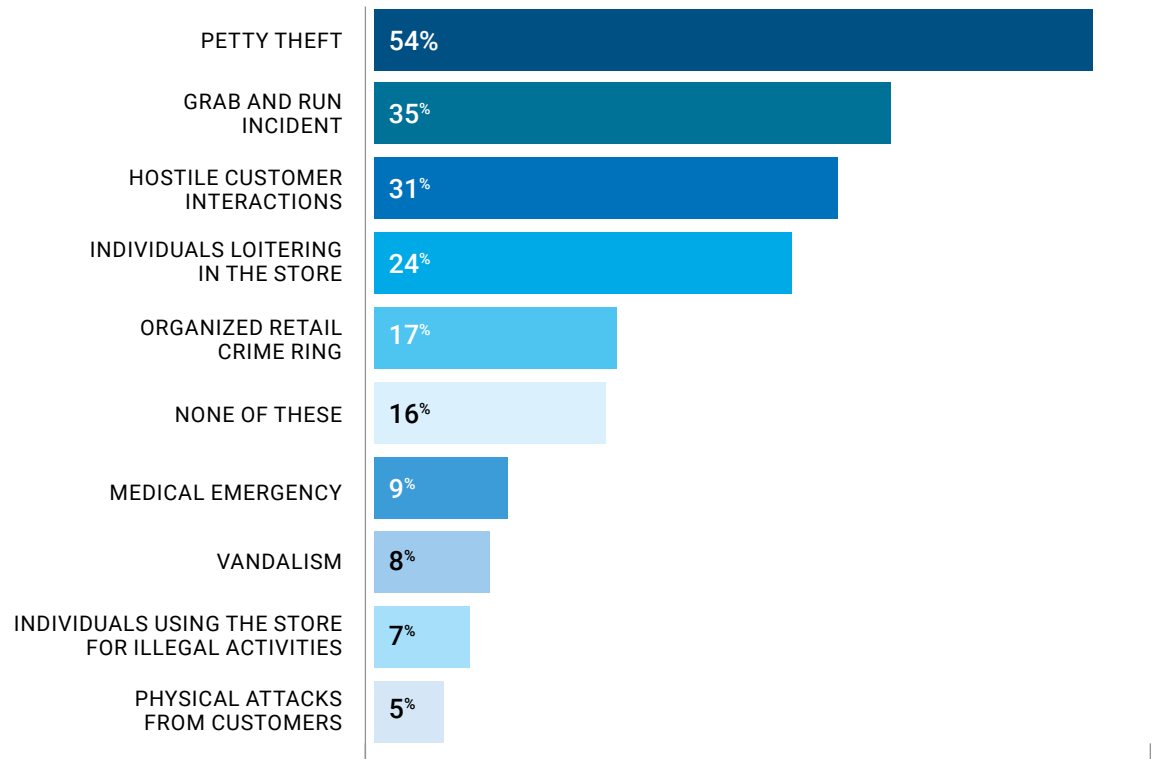
Retail Workers' Top Safety Concerns

Respondents said they have experienced a range of crime, theft and unsafe situations in their stores over the past 12 months, with petty theft (64%) at the top of the list. Hostile customer interactions ranked second, with nearly half (47%) of respondents experiencing verbal or physical abuse, followed by grab and run incidents (44%). These incidents are occurring with greater frequency, according to respondents. More than half (54%) reported a rise in petty theft in the last year, while about one in three said they have experienced an increase in grab and run incidents and hostile customer interactions (35% and 31% respectively).

**Have you or your store experienced any of these situations onsite in the past 12 months?**

Category	Percentage
PETTY THEFT	64%
HOSTILE CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS	47%
GRAB AND RUN INCIDENT	44%
INDIVIDUALS LOITERING IN THE STORE	42%
MEDICAL EMERGENCY	24%
ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME RING	22%
VANDALISM	17%
INDIVIDUALS USING THE STORE FOR ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES	15%
PHYSICAL ATTACKS FROM CUSTOMERS	8%
ARMED ROBBERS	3%

Have you or your store experienced *an increase* in any of these situations in the past 12 months?

Situation	Percent
PETTY THEFT	54%
GRAB AND RUN INCIDENT	35%
HOSTILE CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS	31%
INDIVIDUALS LOITERING IN THE STORE	24%
ORGANIZED RETAIL CRIME RING	17%
NONE OF THESE	16%
MEDICAL EMERGENCY	9%
VANDALISM	8%
INDIVIDUALS USING THE STORE FOR ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES	7%
PHYSICAL ATTACKS FROM CUSTOMERS	5%

Notably, retail workers have also seen an increase in the past 12 months in individuals loitering in the store (24%) and in organized retail crime rings (17%) that have the potential to lead to inventory loss or violence on the retail floor.

Percent of retail associates and managers who said they were at least 'very concerned' about issues occurring in their stores:

50%	43%	42%
Petty theft	Grab and run incidents	Hostile customer interactions
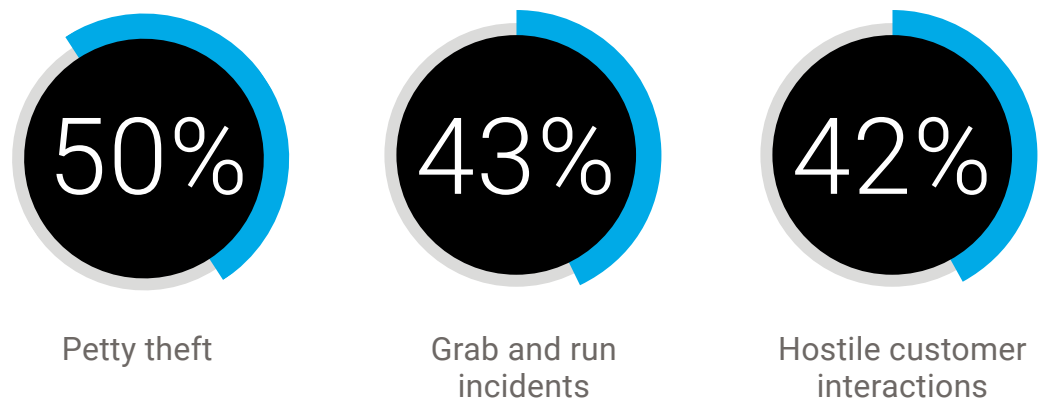
Peak Shopping Season Can Elevate Workers' Concerns Around Safety

The NRF expects holiday shopping sales to surpass record levels this year. After a year where more than half of survey respondents saw a rise in petty theft and about one-third saw a rise in hostile customer interactions at their stores, it's understandable that nearly two out of three (61%) retail workers and managers reported they are at least somewhat concerned for their personal safety heading into holiday shopping season.

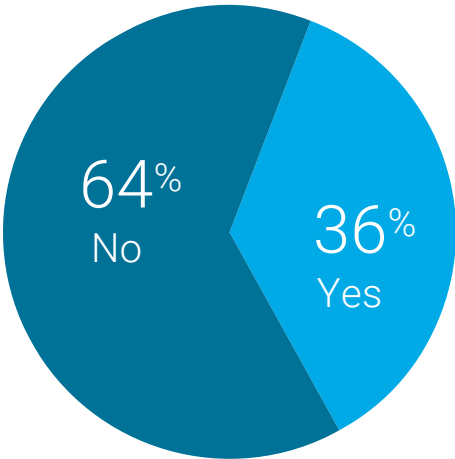**How concerned are you for your personal safety at work leading into peak shopping season?**

- Extremely concerned
- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Hardly concerned
- Not at all concerned

34%
29%
16%
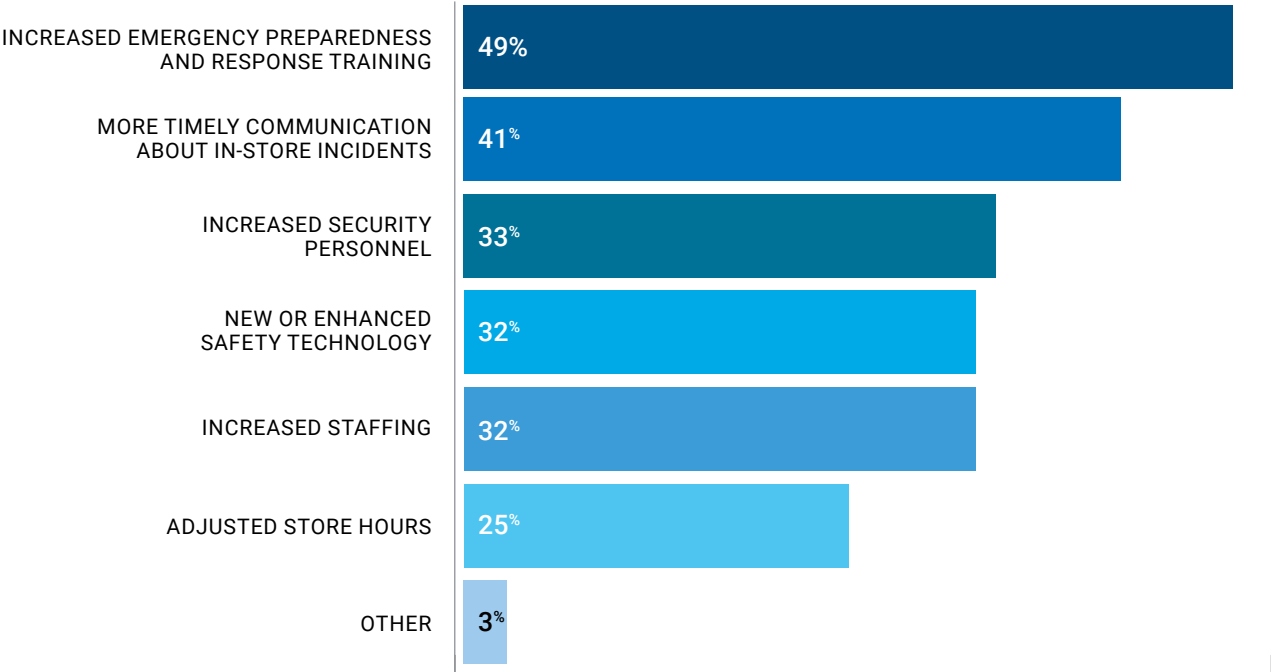11%
10%

61%
at least
"somewhat concerned"
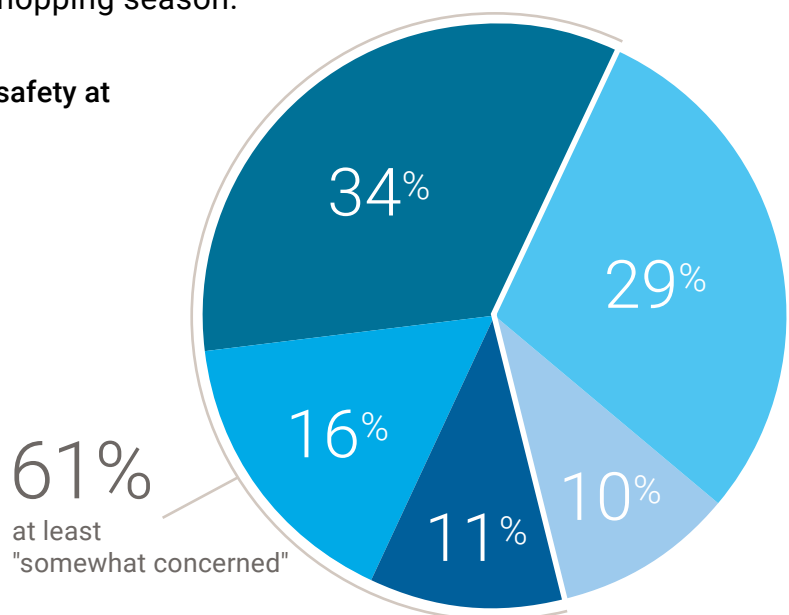
Some retailers are updating their safety and security protocols to support preparedness. About one-third (36%) said that their employer has introduced a new worker safety measure in the past 12 months, with top changes including increased emergency response training (49%), more timely communication about in-store incidents (41%) and adding security personnel (33%). Retail workers also noted that seeing a change in customer attitudes (44%) would impact their feelings around personal safety, and that video security cameras (69%), alarm systems (44%) and more store personnel (40%) would make them feel safer at work.
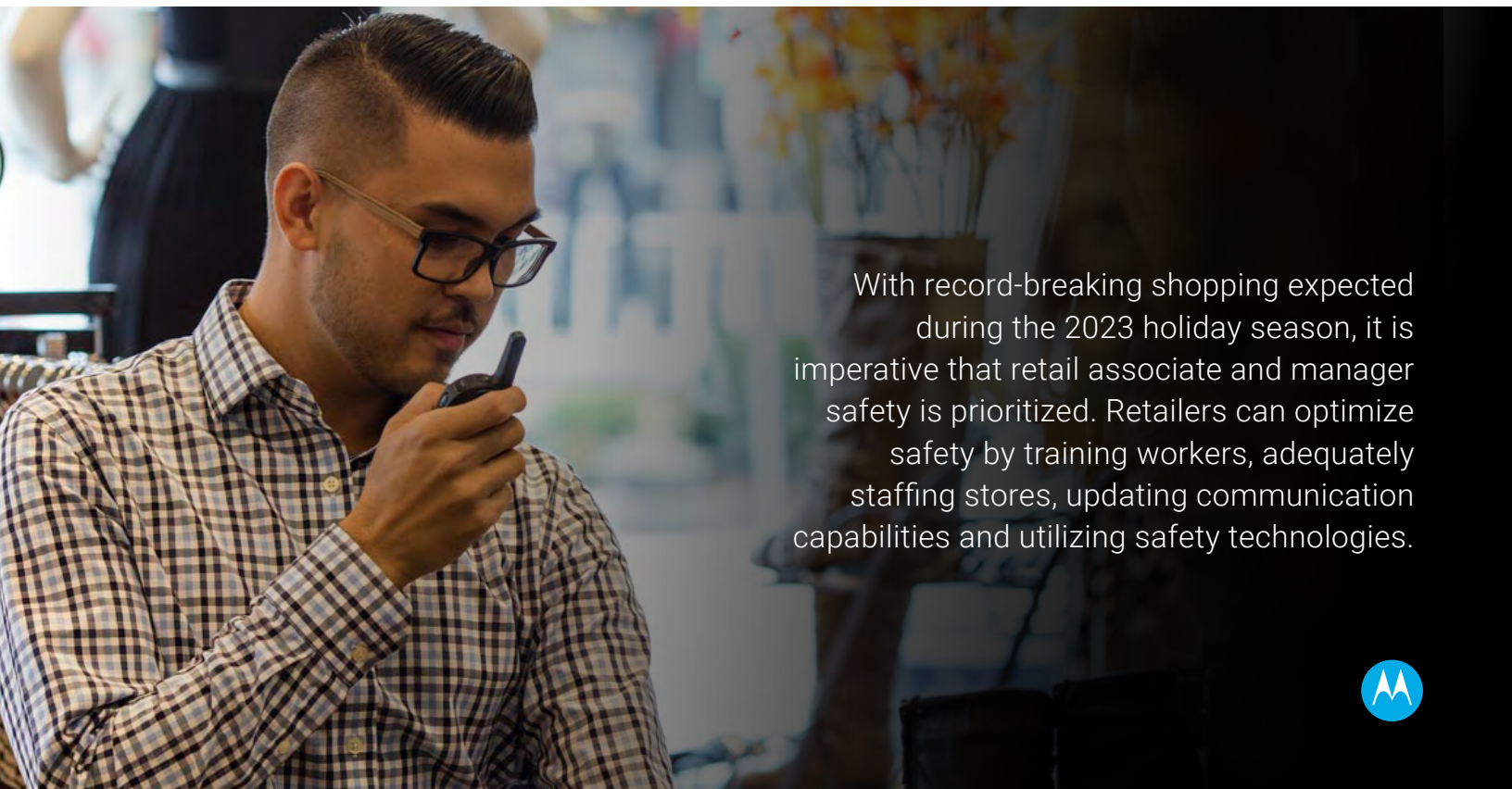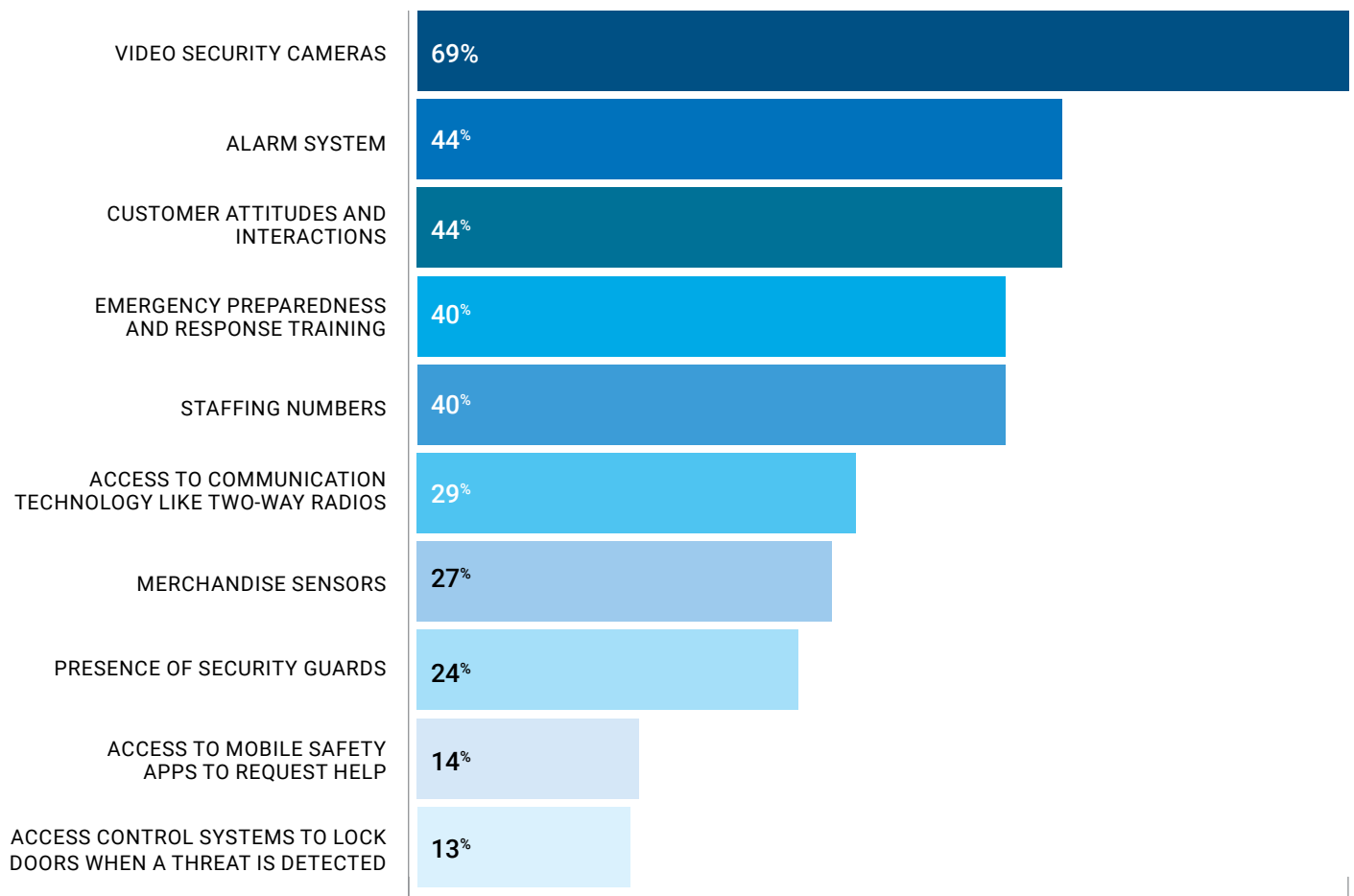
Over the past year, has your employer introduced new changes to address worker safety concerns?

64% No

36% Yes

What types of changes have been made?

INCREASED EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TRAINING	49%
MORE TIMELY COMMUNICATION ABOUT IN-STORE INCIDENTS	41%
INCREASED SECURITY PERSONNEL	33%
NEW OR ENHANCED SAFETY TECHNOLOGY	32%
INCREASED STAFFING	32%
ADJUSTED STORE HOURS	25%
OTHER	3%

What factors impact how safe you feel at work?

Factor	%
VIDEO SECURITY CAMERAS	69%
ALARM SYSTEM	44%
CUSTOMER ATTITUDES AND INTERACTIONS	44%
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TRAINING	40%
STAFFING NUMBERS	40%
ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LIKE TWO-WAY RADIOS	29%
MERCHANDISE SENSORS	27%
PRESENCE OF SECURITY GUARDS	24%
ACCESS TO MOBILE SAFETY APPS TO REQUEST HELP	14%
ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEMS TO LOCK DOORS WHEN A THREAT IS DETECTED	13%

With record-breaking shopping expected during the 2023 holiday season, it is imperative that retail associate and manager safety is prioritized. Retailers can optimize safety by training workers, adequately staffing stores, updating communication capabilities and utilizing safety technologies.
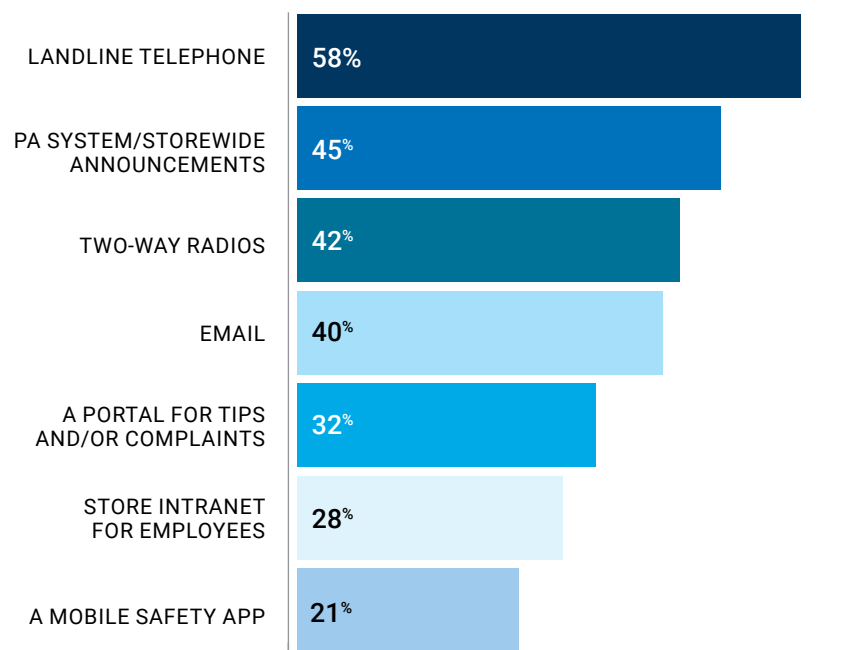
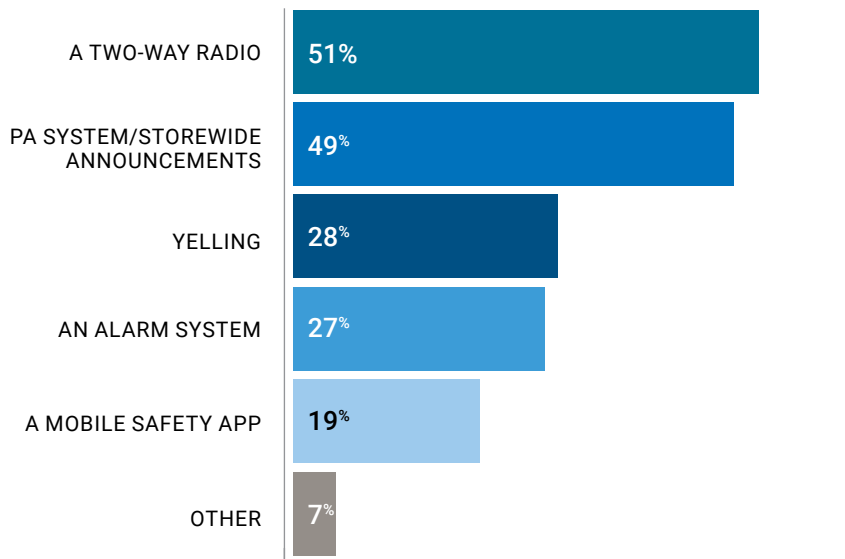# Emergency Preparedness and Communications Capabilities are Key

Survey respondents said they often rely on low-tech communication channels like landline telephones (58%) and PA systems (45%) to report safety concerns, while nearly one-third (28%) would rely on yelling to inform coworkers of an incident. Yet low-tech communication methods can often hinder the speed and efficacy of reporting criminal acts or safety concerns, as they require multiple steps for store personnel to notify key stakeholders such as managers in a backroom, security officers and first responders, versus notifying everyone at once. This can lead to a delayed response should store employees need immediate help.

When retailers share safety information with employees, respondents said it's typically through bulletin boards (67%) or hard copy documentation handed out to each employee (33%). Forty-six percent said their retailer provides an online portal or website to access safety information.
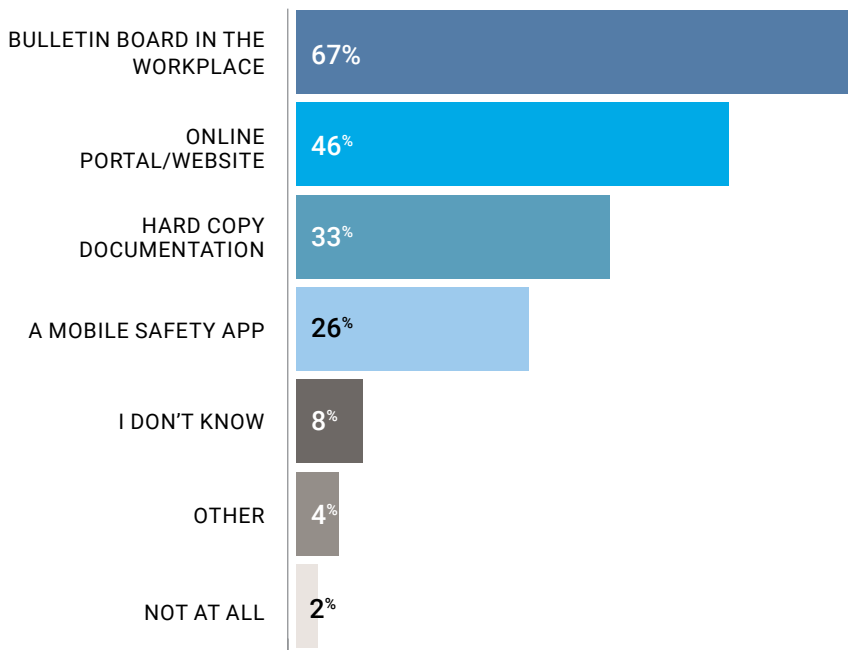
What methods of communication do you have access to at work to report safety concerns?

Method	Percentage
LANDLINE TELEPHONE	58%
PA SYSTEM/STOREWIDE ANNOUNCEMENTS	45%
TWO-WAY RADIOS	42%
EMAIL	40%
A PORTAL FOR TIPS AND/OR COMPLAINTS	32%
STORE INTRANET FOR EMPLOYEES	28%
A MOBILE SAFETY APP	21%

If an incident occurs in your store, how are you able to instantly notify all co-workers onsite?

- A TWO-WAY RADIO — 51%
- PA SYSTEM/STOREWIDE ANNOUNCEMENTS — 49%
- YELLING — 28%
- AN ALARM SYSTEM — 27%
- A MOBILE SAFETY APP — 19%
- OTHER — 7%

How can you access safety information such as emergency procedures or emergency contacts for your store?

- BULLETIN BOARD IN THE WORKPLACE — 67%
- ONLINE PORTAL/WEBSITE — 46%
- HARD COPY DOCUMENTATION — 33%
- A MOBILE SAFETY APP — 26%
- I DON'T KNOW — 8%
- OTHER — 4%
- NOT AT ALL — 2%

When an emergency strikes, every second counts. Leveraging modern communication channels, such as mobile safety apps or panic button solutions, can go a long way in connecting in-store employees, security personnel, corporate retail entities and first responders.
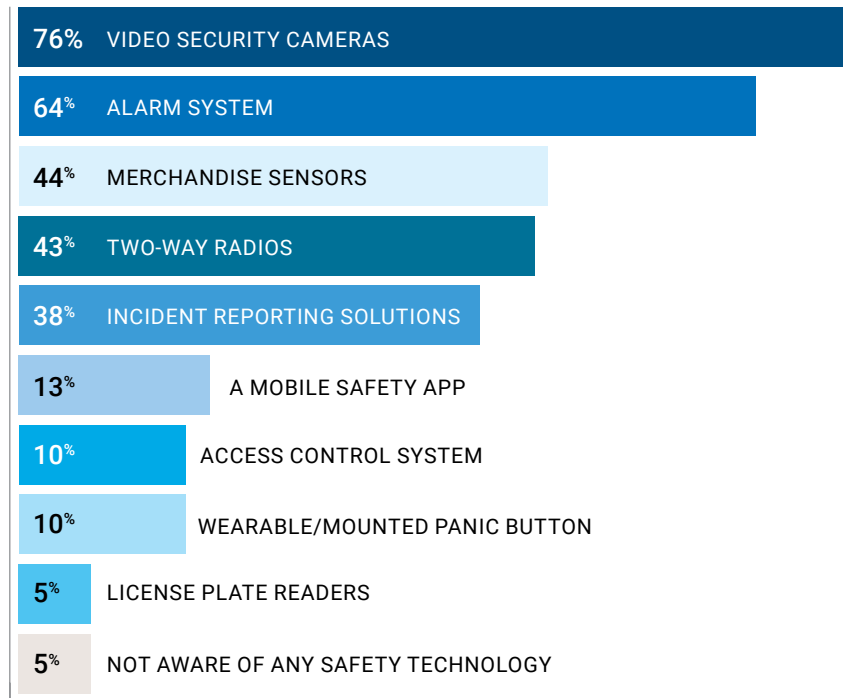
Leveraging updated technology systems can provide all retail employees with the peace of mind they need to perform their job duties and give customers a better shopping experience.

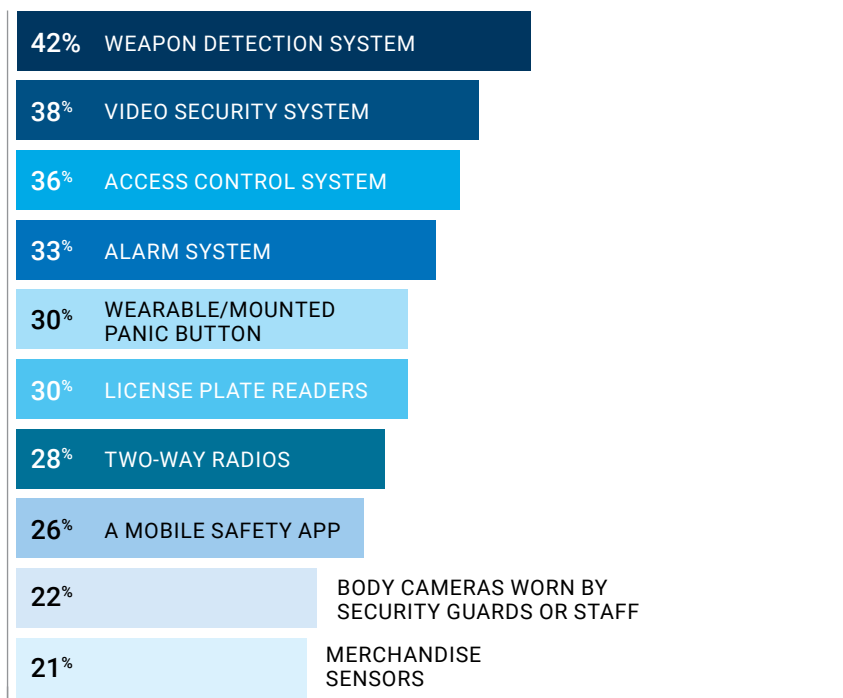# Technology Can Be Transformative for Retail Stores

Given employees' concerns about the increase of theft and safety incidents within their stores, it's important for retailers to evaluate the security technologies they use to prevent, detect and respond to threats. Respondents said their stores currently feature video security systems (76%), alarm systems (64%) and merchandise sensors (44%), but that additional technologies would make them feel safer such as artificial intelligence (AI) to detect guns (42%), access control systems to lock doors when threats are detected (36%), wearable/mounted panic buttons to alert for help (30%) and license plate readers to identify vehicles associated with criminal activity (30%).

What types of safety technology are you aware of in your store?

- **76%** VIDEO SECURITY CAMERAS
- **64%** ALARM SYSTEM
- **44%** MERCHANDISE SENSORS
- **43%** TWO-WAY RADIOS
- **38%** INCIDENT REPORTING SOLUTIONS
- **13%** A MOBILE SAFETY APP
- **10%** ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEM
- **10%** WEARABLE/MOUNTED PANIC BUTTON
- **5%** LICENSE PLATE READERS
- **5%** NOT AWARE OF ANY SAFETY TECHNOLOGY

What types of safety technology would make you feel safer at work?

- **42%** WEAPON DETECTION SYSTEM
- **38%** VIDEO SECURITY SYSTEM
- **36%** ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEM
- **33%** ALARM SYSTEM
- **30%** WEARABLE/MOUNTED PANIC BUTTON
- **30%** LICENSE PLATE READERS
- **28%** TWO-WAY RADIOS
- **26%** A MOBILE SAFETY APP
- **22%** BODY CAMERAS WORN BY SECURITY GUARDS OR STAFF
- **21%** MERCHANDISE SENSORS

Retail Workers Are Speaking Up

If a threat were to occur in their store, the majority (77%) of respondents said they would report an issue if they feared for their own or a co-worker's safety, even if reporting mechanisms were not anonymous. Twenty-percent more would report a threatening scenario if they could do so anonymously. This shows an overwhelming willingness among retail workers to speak up about retail crime and violent in-store incidents.

When asked how they document and report crimes to police or insurers, more than half (59%) said they rely on verbal reports to bosses or security who then contact police/insurance, or use an online (31%) or paper reporting system (29%). For any type of report — anonymous or not — technology can help employees document details quickly and accurately so that key data can be readily shared with internal and external sources for reporting and investigative purposes.
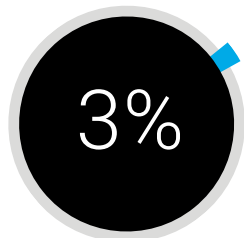
If there was a scenario at work where you feared for your own or a co-worker's safety, how likely would you be to report the issue?
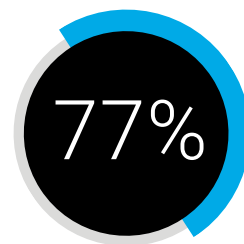
77% — I would report it, even without it being anonymous
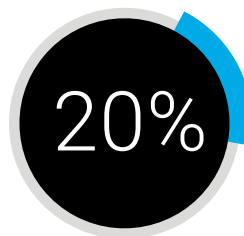
20% — I would report it if I could do so anonymously

3% — I would not report it

Retail Workers Feel Safer in Numbers

Forty percent of retail workers and managers said staffing numbers have an impact on their feelings of personal safety at work. However, with the holiday rush, 64% expect their store to be understaffed at times, which could impact their feelings of safety.

Going into peak holiday shopping season, do you anticipate your store will be short-staffed?

64% Yes

36% No
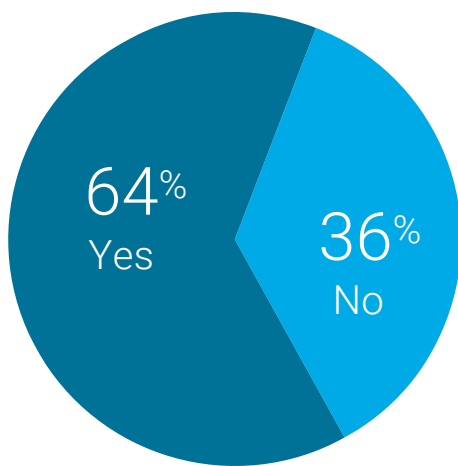
Workers who feel safer stay longer. One in four (26%) respondents said they have considered leaving retail due to safety concerns. Retailers who invest in store safety and security measures are more likely to build employee morale and retention.

By proactively assessing employee safety concerns and introducing innovative technologies that detect, deter and capture footage of criminal activities, retailers can more holistically address the increasing number of safety and security incidents unfolding in their stores today. Video solutions including mounted cameras, body cameras, visible firearm detection and license plate readers can help to thwart in-store crime, while panic buttons and mobile safety applications can support retail associates and managers by swiftly and seamlessly connecting to those who can help when safety concerns arise.

Conclusion

Retail workers are concerned with the rise of theft and crime targeting stores today, and their concerns are heightened going into peak shopping season when stores are full and tensions are high. By prioritizing associate and manager concerns and upgrading communication processes as well as security technology, retailers can institute the type of changes workers say would help to address safety issues – not to mention improve the in-store experience for shoppers. After all, when store associates and managers can stay keenly focused on serving their customers it's a retail win-win for all.
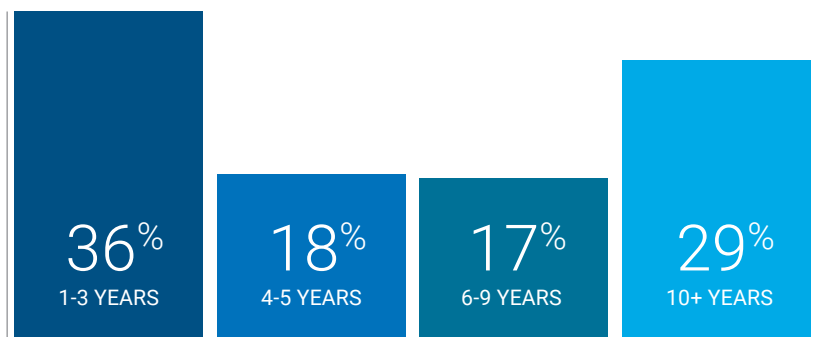
Methodology

The independent market research firm Researchscape conducted this survey. Respondents were 1,131 full- and part-time retail employees in the United States. The survey was conducted in November 2023 and results were weighted to be representative of the overall U.S. population.
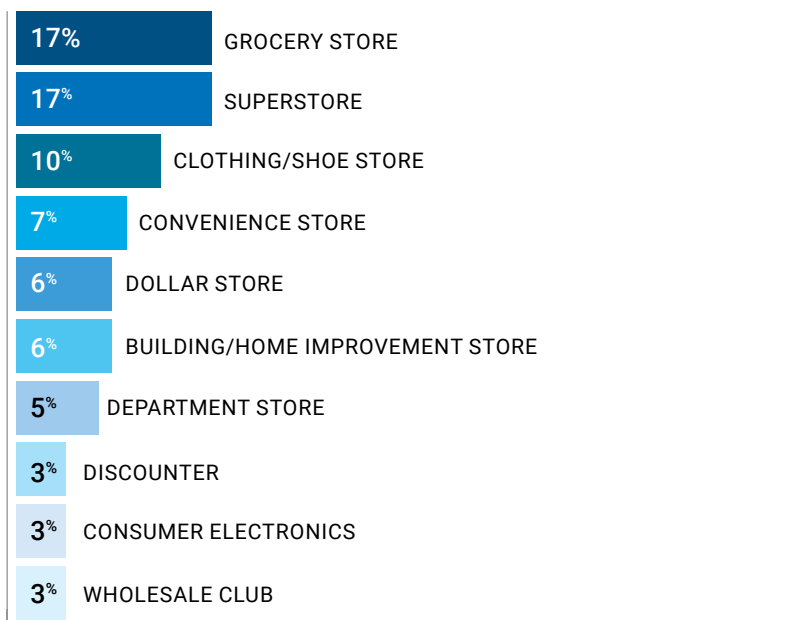
Survey Respondent Demographics

Over half of respondents work at retail organizations with more than 1,000 employees:

1-9 EMPLOYEES	10%
10-99 EMPLOYEES	18%
100-999 EMPLOYEES	18%
1,000-9,999 EMPLOYEES	20%
10,000+EMPLOYEES	34%
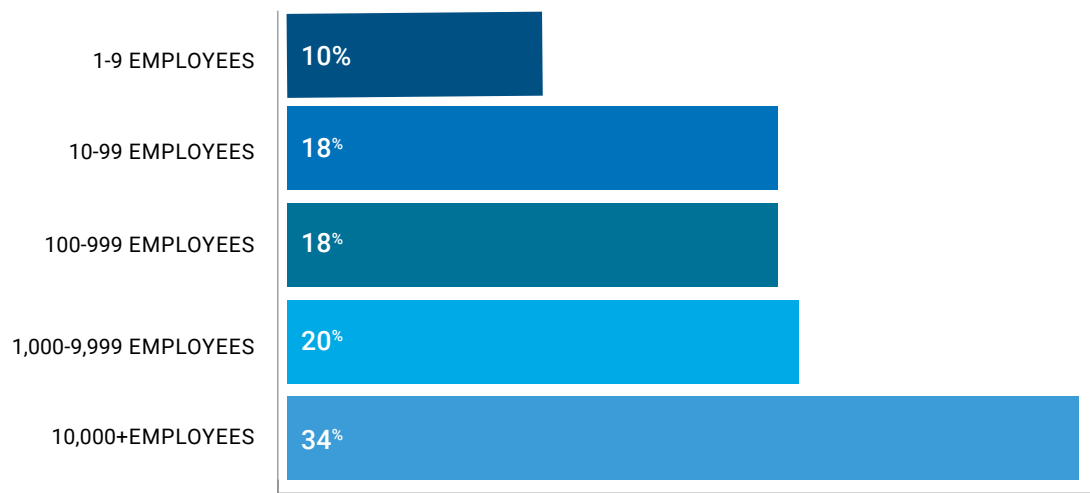
All respondents have at least a one year tenure at their retailer. About one-third have worked for their retailer for 1-3 years and about one-third have worked for their retailer for 10+ years.

36% 1-3 YEARS	18% 4-5 YEARS	17% 6-9 YEARS	29% 10+ YEARS

The following types of retail stores were the most popular places respondents currently work:

%	Store Type
17%	GROCERY STORE
17%	SUPERSTORE
10%	CLOTHING/SHOE STORE
7%	CONVENIENCE STORE
6%	DOLLAR STORE
6%	BUILDING/HOME IMPROVEMENT STORE
5%	DEPARTMENT STORE
3%	DISCOUNTER
3%	CONSUMER ELECTRONICS
3%	WHOLESALE CLUB

About Motorola Solutions

Motorola Solutions is solving for safer. We build and connect technologies to help protect people, property and places. Our solutions enable the collaboration between public safety agencies and enterprises that's critical for a proactive approach to safety and security. Learn more about how we're solving for safer communities, safer schools, safer hospitals, safer businesses – safer everywhere – at www.motorolasolutions.com.

10 states
with most respondents:

%	State
12%	California
8%	Texas
7%	Florida
6%	New York
4%	Ohio
4%	Illinois
4%	Pennsylvania
3%	Massachusetts
3%	Tennessee
3%	Michigan

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