

Santa Ana PD: Robberies Increase By 50%, Suspects Using Face Covering Orders To Their Advantage

SANTA ANA (CBSLA) — Pointing a gun right at a gas station clerk, a man in a traffic vest and a ball cap demanded money as his accomplice, wearing a mask, grabbed the cash.

“We’re sitting here not knowing who’s going to walk through that door,” Elias Khawan, the owner, said.

The thieves, who did not initially raise the clerk’s suspicion due to local orders for face coverings in light of [the coronavirus pandemic](#), took off in a silver Nissan Altima last Friday at 2 a.m.

Khawan said he has never seen anything like it the 17 years he’s run his Santa Ana gas station and convenience store. He said local face covering requirements put his staff in danger.

“It’s horrible,” he said. “I mean, I know we have to take certain measures because of what’s happening with COVID-19, but it’s the perfect script or manual for a robber — the mask, the sunshade and a hoodie. You don’t know who’s coming, who’s walking in.”

Khawan and his staff feel so unsafe that he has cut his hours from being open all night to closing at 10 p.m., a 25% hit to his bottom line. He has also added signs at his store prohibiting hoodies, backpacks and handbags.

“They’re very scared,” he said. “I have two employees who said, ‘No, we don’t want to work at nighttime.’”

And Santa Ana police confirmed Thursday that robberies in the city have increased by 50% since the lockdown.

In an April robbery, a thief hid his face with a bandana at a doughnut shop on Bristol. The cashier was caught off guard when the thief pulled out a gun and placed it on the counter. The thief then emptied both registers before getting away.

“It’s the norm,” Cpl. Anthony Bertagna, with Santa Ana PD, said. “So we’re seeing more and more suspects wearing the mask and using that to their benefit.”

Police said they were not exactly sure why there has been such an increase in robberies, but said it could be related to the number of inmates released from area jails due to the pandemic.

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