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Alcohol Tops List of Most Stolen Supermarket Items Across Europe, Study Finds

Thieves increasingly target high-value alcoholic drinks for resale, with self-checkout areas emerging as prime theft hotspots.

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Alcoholic beverages have become the most stolen product in supermarkets across Europe, according to a recent study by STC in collaboration with several European companies that are business partners of the Dutch firm Nedap. The research shows that alcohol consistently ranks among the top five most stolen items in nearly every European country. In Italy, Germany, Spain, Ireland, and Belgium, alcoholic drinks occupy the number one spot for theft.

The study indicates that most thefts are not for personal consumption but for resale. Thieves tend to target high-value products, well-known brands, and gourmet items. This trend is reflected in the types of goods most frequently stolen after alcohol: health and beauty products come next, followed by meat, chocolate, and coffee. Basic food staples such as flour or dried pasta are rarely taken. The data suggests that theft driven by hunger is almost nonexistent; instead, brand-name and luxury items are the main targets.

The preferences for stolen alcoholic beverages vary by country. In Spain, wine is the most commonly stolen drink. In Belgium and Finland, beer is more frequently targeted than wine or spirits, which dominate theft statistics in other regions. These differences highlight how local tastes and cultural habits influence what thieves choose to steal.

The locations within supermarkets where theft occurs have also shifted with changes in retail technology. Self-checkout areas are now considered the most vulnerable spots for shoplifting. The lack of supervision during scanning, lenient weighing systems, and the pressure to speed up transactions create opportunities for undetected theft. Other risk zones include aisles with blind spots and closed traditional checkout counters that can serve as quick escape routes for those pushing carts filled with stolen goods.

Retailers face a challenge as self-service options become more popular. While these systems offer convenience to shoppers and help reduce labor costs, they also increase exposure to losses from theft. To address this issue, many stores are investing in new security technologies. Protective polycarbonate covers at checkouts and security collars on bottles are among the measures being adopted. Companies using these solutions report a noticeable drop in theft rates.

The findings underline a broader trend in European retail: as shopping habits evolve and technology advances, so do the methods used by those seeking to steal high-value goods. Supermarkets are responding by adapting their security strategies to protect their inventory while maintaining customer convenience.