

SmartWater fragrance tester marking

Utilising SmartWater forensic marking liquid to reduce theft of fragrance tester bottles.

First published
15 October 2025

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Retail crime Theft and burglary
Organisation	Devon and Cornwall Police
Contact	Christopher Chaloner
Email address	11781@dc.police.uk
Region	South West
Partners	Police Business and commerce
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	May 2025
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults

Aim

During 2024, Boots, a health and beauty retailer recorded high volumes of stolen fragrance bottles.

The intervention utilises a forensic marking solution for fragrance testers in Boots retail stores, targeting the rising issue of fragrance theft. Through collaboration with Boots Crime Intelligence Team, this initiative uses data-driven insights to reduce theft and improve crime prevention efforts.

Intended outcome

The project leverages technology, such as the Auror intelligence platform, to analyse trends and guide interventions, while working closely with Boots retail to ensure effective and sustainable implementation.

Intended outcomes:

- reduce fragrance tester thefts by introducing visible forensic marking, making it easier for police to trace stolen items
- utilise data analytics to pinpoint high-risk areas for theft, providing a targeted approach
- engage and collaborate with Boots, Devon and Cornwall Police to ensure successful rollout and long-term sustainability

Description

The aim of the intervention was to reduce theft of fragrance testers by marking them with SmartWater, making the bottles identifiable as property of Boots which were never intended for sale.

Stages

- Engagement with Boots Crime Intelligence Team – initial contact with Boots' Crime Intelligence Team is crucial to gather information about the scale and patterns of fragrance tester thefts. Using Boots' internal data from the Auror intelligence platform, trends and hot spots of theft can be identified, enabling a targeted response.
- Using Auror data – the Auror Retail Crime Intelligence platform was utilised to provide real-time data on incidents related to fragrance tester thefts. This data helped pinpoint specific stores within the Boots network that experience higher levels of theft. Policing can receive access to this data

from Auror free of charge to monitor patterns and inform intervention efforts.

- Crime Prevention Team at Devon and Cornwall Police – tactical advisors played a pivotal role in advising on best practices for preventing theft and the integration of forensic marking solutions. This initiative was introduced by this team.
- Collaboration with Neighbourhood Policing Teams and senior officers – to ensure a comprehensive response to fragrance theft, buy-in from NPTs within Devon and Cornwall Police was essential. These officers will be tasked with using ultraviolets (UV) lights during operations to detect and seize marked items, making it easier to track stolen goods and apprehend offenders.
- Purchasing and implementation of forensic marking kit – the purchase of the forensic marking kit, including visible signage, will be facilitated through DeterTech's Police Liaison Team. The force purchased the business kit which will come with the necessary signage to alert potential offenders to the presence of forensic marking and its consequences. SmartWater by DeterTech is a Secured by Design product.
- Boots selection rationale – the decision to focus on Boots retail as a partner for this initiative stems from the identified rise in fragrance tester thefts within their stores, highlighted by the Auror intelligence platform. Boots retail stores are high-traffic locations, and fragrance testers are often targeted due to their high value and relatively easy concealment. By addressing this issue in Boots retail stores, the force aimed to reduce theft in one of the most targeted retail categories.
- Training and awareness – Boots retail store staff undergo an awareness session on how to use the forensic marking technology. This includes understanding how to apply UV marking to fragrance testers and how to report thefts efficiently. Neighbourhood policing teams were informed, however no training was provided. Once a UV light is applied to a product, it will glow yellow/green if it has been marked with SmartWater.

Overall impact

- in the month following implementation, the force identified a 67% drop in stolen fragrance testers in comparison to the previous month
- data is being continuously monitored through the Auror platform to observe longer-term impact
- Boots retail have provided positive feedback since its implementation and have commented on more positive relationships with local policing teams

Learning

- engage NPTs early and ensure all officers have access to UV torches

- there is a benefit to shining UV torches on all property, hands, clothing, shoes so that potential suspects become aware of SmartWater in the hope of deterring them from stealing the product in the first place
- this will not completely stop fragrance tester thefts – work to utilise the UV torches during unrelated searches of houses may uncover stolen stock. Any fragrance product with the SmartWater on will have been a tester and could never have been purchased
- the purchasing of SmartWater is easily done by contacting DeterTech. Prices for the kits can be obtained by speaking with DeterTech's Police Liaison

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.