

Off-Strip casinos are full of security, so how do they keep getting robbed?

Written by Administrator
Friday, 06 January 2023 09:30 -

It's one of the more famous scenes from Martin Scorsese's movie "Casino," when Robert DeNiro's character Sam Rothstein lists the myriad layers of security that go into protecting the fictional Tangiers from cheaters. At the top of this food chain: the all-seeing surveillance cameras.

"And the eye in the sky is watching us all," he says, a line that holds true in the real Las Vegas outside of the movies.

So how is it that there have been four unsolved robberies of off-Strip casinos across the Las Vegas Valley since November?

Experts say the casinos have no interest in taking a robbery situation and risk turning it into something more violent or tragic. As such, the key is to comply with a robber's demands and never confront them, then surveillance technology to capture the perpetrator later.

"There is a very intentional effort to de-escalate," said Mehmet Erdem, associate professor of hotel operations and technology at UNLV.

Those four recent robberies occurred at

— [Gold Coast](#) , Nov. 16

— [Green Valley Ranch](#) , Dec. 12

— [Silverton](#) , Dec. 20

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— [Rampart](#) , Dec. 24

And that list doesn't include another robbery that targeted the Resorts World on Nov. 9. In that case, \$6,000 was taken from the casino cage.

But unlike the four other heists, which targeted casinos off the Strip, that robbery netted the arrest of suspect Zubaid Al Jarmi, 25, on Nov. 16. According to reports, at the time he was on probation for a 2020 robbery of the casino cage at The Venetian.

But the robberies of the Gold Coast, Green Valley Ranch Resort, Silverton and Rampart Casino all remain unsolved with no arrests made.

Alan Feldman, who worked in the gaming industry for nearly 30 years with MGM Resorts International and who is now a distinguished fellow at UNLV's International Gaming Institute, said the number of recent robberies "feels like it's a bit high."

Although Feldman has decades of experience in the gaming industry, he was careful to clarify, as did Erdem, that he is not a law enforcement or security expert.

But from his many years as a senior executive in the casinos on the Strip, Feldman said that casino cage robberies seem relatively rare, with a high likelihood of being solved.

"Casinos are pretty lousy targets for something like this," Feldman said. "And this impression that they just keep millions and millions of dollars sitting around isn't true."

Both Feldman and Erdem added that financial losses via cyber crime are likely costing the casinos more money than old-school, over-the-counter robberies.

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Investigations underway

For its part, the Metropolitan Police Department is investigating the Gold Coast, Silverton and Rampart robberies, while the Henderson Police Department is investigating the robbery of the Green Valley Ranch Resort.

Metro also said that the FBI assists with the investigations, and sometimes the bureau will pursue federal charges.

Asked if police believe that one person or one group of people might be responsible for the robberies, a Metro spokesperson said in an email that is “always a possibility and something we are looking into as part of the ongoing investigations.”

A Henderson police spokesperson said in an email that because the Green Valley Ranch robbery is still an open case, no further information would be released.

Police also wouldn't say how much money was taken from each casino.

Tightlipped

Spokespeople for the Gold Coast and Green Valley Ranch declined to comment, citing the ongoing law enforcement investigations.

Erdem said the casinos' priorities are containing any possible criminal situation so that it doesn't flare up into a violent encounter in which lives are lost, which can obviously be catastrophic for the victims and their families but also for any businesses including hotels and casinos.

The thinking among the casinos is that the risk of confronting a robber, and creating a situation

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that might provoke deadly violence, is a risk that businesses in the hospitality industry, as well as other sectors such as retail, are not willing to take on.

“So it’s common sense to minimize anything that’s going to possibly escalate the situation,” Erdem said.

“There is a desire to make certain that safety is maintained at the highest level,” Feldman said.

Casinos also need to look and feel welcoming, so you’re often not going to see armed guards and metal detectors at the entry and exit points, Erdem said. Nobody in the industry wants a casino to look like an airport or a prison.

But Feldman noted that since 9/11, people are generally more accepting, even more comfortable, with visible security. The days of the casinos going out of their way to hide their security presence are largely over. He also said that certain Strip casinos have armed tactical response teams.

As a former executive vice president at MGM Resorts International, which now operates over a dozen Strip hotels, Feldman said he can remember about 12 to 15 casino cage robberies affecting the properties where he worked during nearly three decades on the Strip.

“They don’t happen that frequently,” Feldman said of casino robberies. “They certainly don’t these days.”

Past casino heists

Some pretty notorious casino robberies have gone down over the years.

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In 2000, 27-year-old Reginald Johnson committed three robberies in a six-month stretch at Treasure Island, nabbing \$55,000 in July, about \$30,000 in October and nothing in December 2000, when he was foiled by bars the casino had installed around the casino cashier's desk but shot a security guard, who survived. He was arrested the next day, according to a Review-Journal report from the time, while walking barefoot down Lake Mead Boulevard in a Hello Kitty nightshirt and a Santa Claus hat.

In June 2001, police arrested Jose Manuel Vigoa, who was the ringleader of a gang involved in several heists including the robbery over \$155,000 from the casino cages at the Bellagio on June 3, 2000, as well as the fatal shootings of two armored car guards outside a Ross Dress for Less store in Henderson in March 2000.

In December 2010, Anthony Carleo, the son of a Las Vegas judge, made off with \$1.5 million in chips from the Bellagio. Carrying a handgun and wearing a motorcycle helmet, Carleo [was dubbed the "Bellagio Bandit."](#)

He was caught after trying to sell 14 \$25,000 chips at a cut rate to an undercover Las Vegas police officer.

In 2019, a Las Vegas police officer shot and killed Michael Charles Cohen, 49, [after an armed robbery at the Bellagio](#)

. Cohen then shot a police officer outside the hotel, and was killed when officers returned fire. Police said Cohen also robbed the Bellagio in 2017, the same year that another group of four masked men, one who wore a large pig mask, used sledgehammers to rob a jewelry store.

In the recent cases, police have released photos of a man who is believed to have robbed the Gold Coast as well as photos of a car and a man believed responsible for the Rampart Casino.

In the Gold Coast robbery, the suspect is described as a man standing between 6 feet and 6-foot-2 in height, between 25 and 35 years old, and wearing a black jacket with a hood, black jogging pants and white shoes. In that case, the man threatened to shoot the cashier, police said.

Although this is a similar description released Wednesday of a man police say drove a stolen

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vehicle that was used in the Rampart robbery, police wouldn't say if investigators believe the robberies are connected or believed to have been committed by the same person or group of people, only that it's a possibility.

In this photo, the man, who is also described as being in the same height and age range, is seen wearing a tan hoodie, blue jogging pants and white shoes.

In the Rampart robbery, Metro has also released a photo of a 2009 silver Mazda 6 with a Nevada license plate that reads 902 M64. The car was stolen and used in the robbery, police said.

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