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| Mystery Shopper Information Summary  Class 4 Venues  December 2014 |
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Foreword

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| The following information is a summary of the data collected for all class 4 venues included in the Safer Gambling Venues Mystery Shopper Project, conducted by Gambling Compliance in May and June 2014.  The background, purpose, and detailed methodology of this project are explained in Mystery Shopper 2014: Project Summary. This is located on the Department’s website and can be accessed at the following link:  <http://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Services-Casino-and-Non-Casino-Gaming-Mystery-Shopper-campaign>  The data collected for the project and included in the following document is subject to caveats detailed in the above named document. |
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# Introduction

The Department initiated the mystery shopper research exercise to test host responsibility practice in casinos and class 4 venues, and to gain an accurate indication of actual practice in harm prevention and minimisation (HPM).

The research observed the HPM and host responsibility practice of venue staff and casino staff.

The information gathered from the class 4 research serves as a current baseline for host responsibility practice, indicating areas the class 4 sector should focus on to improve practice, and informing the Department’s wider strategy for improved host responsibility.

Some 102 class 4 non-club venues were included in the research, representing around 10 per cent of the total number of non-club venues.

Each venue was visited once for around two hours. Shoppers were instructed to visit after 12pm and not later than 7pm. Visits were not deliberately undertaken at characteristically busy times for hospitality, although some did occur at such times.

# Key findings

## Monitoring of gambling area

**A total of 88 venues out of 102 (86 per cent) did not meet best practice for monitoring gambling areas.**

Recognised best-practice for monitoring gambling areas is to conduct ‘sweeps’[[1]](#footnote-1) of the area every 15 minutes, as agreed to by many societies in host responsibility policies, and claimed as a cost in venue cost schedules[[2]](#footnote-2).

At each visit to a venue, shoppers recorded the number of sweeps of the area and their frequency. Following best practise, our shoppers should have seen eight sweeps conducted over each two hour visit, with a sweep conducted every 15 minutes.

A total of 10 out of the 102 (9.8 per cent) venues visited were recorded as having eight or more sweeps over the two-hour duration of the visit. Out of the 10, only eight venues were recorded as having the frequency of sweeps consistently every 15 minutes.

Some visits conducted fell short of two hours in duration, due to instructions to shoppers to leave when their gambling budget was reached. No visits were less than 1.5 hours in duration. In light of this, six or seven sweeps could also equate to a best-practice result. A total of 14 out of 102 (14 per cent) had six or more sweeps and therefore demonstrated best practice; conversely 88 out of 102 venues (86 per cent) had less than six sweeps.

Of the 296 sweeps that occurred, only 92 sweeps (31.1%) clearly related to harm minimisation according to the observations of the shoppers. The remaining 204 (68.0%) sweeps were recorded as ‘other’. These were sweeps that appeared to be motivated by other factors, such as refilling a machine hopper, clearing a credit, or collecting empty glasses. It is difficult to determine whether staff were also actively checking on patrons’ gambling behaviour while carrying out these tasks. (Note that total ‘other sweeps’ {204} are included in total sweeps {296}).

The table below shows full results for this area:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Number of sweeps | Number of venues with this result | Percentage of venues | Total number of sweeps that occurred |
| No sweeps | 10 | 9.8% | 0 |
| 1 sweep | 21 | 20.6% | 21 |
| 2 sweeps | 22 | 21.6% | 44 |
| 3 sweeps | 20 | 19.6% | 60 |
| 4 sweeps | 10 | 9.8% | 40 |
| 5 sweeps | 5 | 4.9% | 25 |
| 6 sweeps | 2 | 2.0% | 12 |
| 7 sweeps | 2 | 2.0% | 14 |
| 8+ sweeps | 10 | 9.8% | 80 |
| **Total** | **102** | **100.0%** | **296** |

## Response to scripted scenario

**Ninety-nine per cent of scripted scenarios delivered by mystery shoppers did not result in an intervention from staff.**

At two venues shoppers were unable to deliver the scripted scenario.

For the Class 4 exercise shoppers had a float of $40.

They started gambling with $20 and then on two occasions withdrew a further $20 from venue staff. The last $20 withdrawn was accompanied by one of the scripted problem gambling statements below that indicated the shopper had a potential gambling problem. This final $20 was not gambled:

* Script A: “I’m meant to get home to the kids, but another few minutes won’t hurt”
* Script B: “I can’t really afford it but I think I’m getting close to a win…”
* Script C: “I need to go but I want to win some of my money back…”

Only one scripted scenario received an intervention from staff, and the exchange is described below:

### Intervention

Script enacted: “I need to go but I want to win some of my money back…”

Staff member reaction: Asked if shopper was okay

Shopper description: The staff member said that I looked very sad and asked if I was OK.

Information provided: Verbal; I was told that if I wanted to talk to one of the staff they would be able to help me. The staff member seemed genuinely concerned about my situation.

Other notes: Upon exiting the building I was followed by a staff member who wanted to check that I was OK. They said they were concerned about me because I appeared to be upset and looked like I was going to cry. I said that it was my wedding anniversary and I had just gambled away the money I had set aside to buy my husband some oysters. The staff member suggested that I was the best present he could have - but if I wanted to talk to a staff member about my gambling, they would be able to listen and offer some advice. The staff member seemed genuinely concerned.

A number of shoppers recorded comments by staff in response to the script that indicated they were conscious of what the shopper had said. However, they did not respond in a way that constitutes a harm minimisation intervention. These examples are listed in the Other Observations section on page 7.

## Response to problem gambling indicator behaviour (other patrons)

**Ninety-five per cent of patrons observed displaying general problem gambling indicators[[3]](#footnote-3) did not receive an intervention from staff.**

A hundred patrons were observed displaying possible general problem gambling indicators at 46 of the venues visited. Problem gambling indicators displayed by those patrons are shown in the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Dominant problem gambling indicator displayed | Instances | Percentage |
| Not celebrating wins | 17 | 17.0% |
| Personalising machine (including possible abuse) | 15 | 15.0% |
| Emotional distress | 11 | 11.0% |
| Possessive of particular machine | 8 | 8.0% |
| Claims machines malfunctioning | 7 | 7.0% |
| Multiple withdrawals by EFTPOS | 7 | 7.0% |
| Multiple ATM withdrawals | 6 | 6.0% |
| Tray-surfing | 5 | 5.0% |
| High consumption of alcohol | 3 | 3.0% |
| Irritation at interruption | 2 | 2.0% |
| Attempting to conceal gambling | 1 | 1.0% |
| Rudeness or complaining to staff | 1 | 1.0% |
| Other | 17 | 17.0% |
| **Total** | **100** | **100.0%** |

Five patrons who were observed displaying problem gambling indicators received an intervention from a staff member, as detailed below. These interventions were recorded by the shoppers by choosing from a number of options[[4]](#footnote-4). In cases where the shoppers have not recorded additional notes, it is difficult to determine whether they are genuine harm minimisation interventions.

Lack of intervention could be multifactorial, for example staff either do not recognise problem gambling indicators, do not take responsibility for intervening to prevent harm, or did not feel comfortable intervening. Any of these examples may be as a result of lack of training, ineffective training, or not applying training.

### Intervention 1

Problem gambling indicator displayed: Claims machines malfunctioning.

Shopper description: The patron called the machine an ' f---ing piece of sh-t’, then complained to the bar staff that it was faulty.

Staff member reaction: Provides information; verbal.

Other notes: The staff member explained how the machine worked and that it was designed to pay out 37 per cent[[5]](#footnote-5) of all money fed into it in wins.

### Intervention 2[[6]](#footnote-6)

Problem gambling indicator displayed: Claims machines malfunctioning.

Shopper description: The patron was annoyed that the hopper was empty when they went to cash out their credits. The staff member came along and topped up the hopper, commenting that the new machines were difficult to get into.

Staff member reaction: Provides information; verbal.

Other notes: Not applicable.

### Intervention 3

Problem gambling indicator displayed: Rudeness or complaining to staff

Shopper description: One patron complained several times about not receiving winnings or jackpot.

Staff member reaction: Provides action, verbal.

Other notes: The patron listens to the explanation the staff member provided about how the jackpot works, and they continued playing. However, they did complain again later about the same thing (not winning the jackpot).

### Intervention 4

Problem gambling indicator displayed: Claims machines malfunctioning.

Shopper description: The patron kept saying the machine wasn't working properly.

Staff member reaction: Provides information, verbal.

Other notes: Not applicable.

### Intervention 5[[7]](#footnote-7)

Problem gambling indicator displayed: Emotional distress.

Shopper description: The patron was observed playing one machine for 10 minutes before moving on to another machine and repeating the process. They appeared to be agitated and upset each time they moved to a new machine.

Staff member reaction: Asks is person okay.

Other notes: Not applicable.

# Other observations

The following are some examples taken from the data that are of interest to the Department. They provide an indication of what is occurring across the sector.

## Scripted scenarios

Below are the actual observations and comments recorded by shoppers following their scripted scenarios with venue staff. It should be noted that supporting comments were not provided for all mystery shops:

* Having asked for another $20 I said I should go but needed to win some of my money back. The staff member merely smiled and indicated with her hand to the Eftpos machine for me to enter my PIN number and complete the transaction.
* No intervention, but they did wish me good luck.
* After mentioning that I really needed to win some money back the staff member said nothing but just smiled and walked over to the till to get the $20 for my Eftpos withdrawal.
* They only smiled and nodded at my comment.
* The bar was very noisy and it was difficult to hear. I suspect my comments were not heard at all
* The staff member commented that we all do things at times that we shouldn't and life would be dull if we ignored the shouldnt's.
* Staff member handed me the cash in a brisk manner then turned away to discuss a betting issue with another patron. They seemed more intent on picking the winner for the next race.
* I showed frustration when I made my second withdrawal and the staff member very nicely told me “Can't be your day today eh?"
* They didn't react, but instead of giving me cash out, they told me to use the ATM machine.
* The staff member told me that people asked whether she played the machines and she said that she did not as she had spent too many years behind the bar and saw what it could do to people. She handed me the $20 I had requested and said “I hope you win your money back".
* Stated ' I've heard that one a million times before, which is why I don't go near the pokies with a barge pole'.
* The staff member smiled and said yes, and continued the cash out transaction.
* When I told the staff member I needed to win some money back, and the machines were useless, I was told “Yes, they're not very co-operative are they?"
* The staff member had been talking to another patron and was also watching the flat screen television above the bar whilst serving me. He basically ignored my comment about needing to win some money back, handing me the $20, my Eftpos card and receipt and immediately returned to talking to the other patron. He was fast and efficient but obviously did not want to engage with me, paying me scant attention.
* I was the only person in the gaming room for the duration of my visit. When I presented my scenario, the staff member laughed and said, “Good luck with that."
* They smiled and said “Sure, how much would you take out?".
* They just laughed it off.
* When I made my second withdrawal I staged frustration and told the staff member I wanted to win some of my money back. The staff member gave me a sympathetic smile and that was it!
* When I said that I needed to win some of my money back the staff member acted as though I had not spoken and just continued with the Eftpos transaction.
* When I said that I needed to win some of my money back the staff member looked down, avoiding eye contact with me, and gave me the $20 I had requested and the receipt. My impression was that my comment had pricked his conscience but he did not act on it.
* They smiled at me when I said that.
* They didn't even react to what I said and just carried on. They didn't really talk to me at all.
* They only smiled at me.
* I asked for another $20, saying, with a sigh, that I should really go but really needed to win my money back. The staff member chuckled and cheerfully said “Is the machine not being kind to you?" I unsmilingly replied that it most definitely was not! Unfazed by my response the staff member made no further comment and completed the Eftpos transaction.
* I was told I could not withdraw any more money, and would have to go outside to ATM. I did this.
* The staff member replied, “Good on you."
* The staff member made the comment “gosh is it that time already" then processed my withdrawal and told me to enjoy the rest of my day.[[8]](#footnote-8)
* I tried to emphasise that I really can't afford it, but the only response I got was “Oh."

## Other patron behaviour

The following are some of the comments written by the shoppers around the conduct of other gambling patrons, in particular behaviours that indicated possible problem gambling concerns:

* Other behaviour displayed included asking other patrons for money to play the machines, staring blankly at a machine, leaning backwards on a chair to observe the total credits left on my machine. The patron was tray surfing and also gambled at about 7 different machines. They appeared to be putting notes in and losing all of their money. They seemed agitated at times and almost hyperactive as they switched from one machine to another.
* The patron won one minor jackpot and two other payouts over $200 each. They returned to the gaming room each time to feed it back in. They were obviously a regular as one of people at the bar said “not winning again are you". The patron replied "I must have my lucky socks on today". The person replied "you must spend all your time in here". This was while the patron was being paid out winnings.
* The patron claimed the machine was not working as it should and that it had been much luckier the previous day. There was a comment to another patron made in my direction that the machine I was on might be the one. So I demonstrated my claim on the machine by ignoring the comment and being solely focused on my activity.
* Patron sat in the far corner of the gaming machine with her back turned away from the bar, discreetly feeding notes into the machine over the course of an hour. I would estimate $50 was put into the machine. She stayed at the same machine for the duration of her visit. At one stage rather than activating the buttons with a finger she had her fist clenched and was banging the buttons in a hammering action.
* Patron 1 claimed the machines were not functioning and also talked to the machine and loudly berate it.
* One patron complained several times about not receiving winnings or jackpot.
* The possible problem gambling patron made approximately 8 or 9 trips to the bar to withdraw approximately $180 each time. The patron was playing the machines before I arrived and was still there when I left. Twice towards the end of my visit I lined up behind the patron and the staff member only dispensed the money without talking to the patron.
* They hung around the gaming room for a while and went up to people asking for money.
* The patron was thumping the button and standing up getting very frustrated.
* The patron won $400 plus at the venue and exclaimed that they would end up putting it all back in. "You win some you lose some" was the comment. The patron was also talking to and swearing at the machine.
* The patron was talking to the machine and swearing at the machine. The patron got irritated at the time out interruption feature of the game. The patron was also hitting the buttons harder as the credit level in the machine dropped.
* Yelling at machine. Not in a rude tone, but telling it what to do. They did that quite a few times.
* The patron who demonstrated this tried all the machines and stated loudly that the jackpot should be coming up soon but in a disgruntled way dismissed it saying the machines were probably faulty. No wins were celebrated and there was some tray surfing after other patrons left.
* This is the patron who won the jackpot. They were very loud about winning, and telling everyone how they had won 3x that day already. They also announced (loudly) how they should be going home with all that money. Instead they continued to gamble, although at a different machine.
* The patron was kissing the machine and saying "come on baby."
* The patron went from one machine to the other, staying sometimes only a couple of minutes before changing machines again. They also didn't celebrate any winnings, made several ATM withdrawals, and complained to another patron that the ATM didn't take their eftpos card. The person was there before I arrived and showed no intention of leaving when I left.

# Positive observations

The following are some examples taken from the data that represent elements of good practice. Such examples suggest that good harm minimisation practice is achievable under the current training framework:

* Three minutes before I was due to make my second withdrawal and with $67.61 credit still to use, I won the Jackpot valued at $450. This made the total cashed up payout of $517.61. In a slightly dazed state I approached the bar and asked them to check this for me. Another patron congratulated me and called for the manager to assist. I requested payment by cheque but was given the amount in cash and told that they did not usually pay out with cheques these days. I said I was thinking of playing some more **but it was suggested that maybe it was time for me to go home.** I was not asked for any ID but did have to sign a payment check sheet to say I had received the money. I continued in my ' role' saying how my hubby hated me playing the pokies and now I could prove it was all worthwhile. One of the patrons suggested I could now buy some nice clothes and get a haircut. I left the premises slightly shaken. Because of this unexpected surprise, I was unable to undertake the second withdrawal or conduct the role play. However, I gave plenty of indicators that I had a gambling addiction.
* I left with a despondent look and a heavy sigh. **The staff member asked if I was OK** - and I said not really, I've just lost all my money. They were in conversation with another patron at the time, so I continued to walk out of the premises.

1. A “sweep” of a gambling area refers to a staff member entering the area and checking on gambling patrons to develop an awareness of patrons and their behaviour, and to ensure they are not displaying signs of gambling harm. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Not all venue cost schedules reflect this; some societies do not stipulate this detail in their venue agreements with venue operators. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. General problem gambling indicators described in Mystery shop 2014: project summary [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Options included providing information, asking if person is ok, suggesting they take a break, requesting they leave venue, or other. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The information given by the staff member was incorrect. The return to player for class 4 gaming machines must be between 78-92%, including any jackpot contribution. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This intervention occurred at the same venue as intervention 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This intervention took place at the same venue as the single intervention in response to the scripted scenario. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Scripted scenario was “I’m meant to go home to the kids, but another few minutes won’t hurt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)