



LAST RESTING PLACE of two of an estimated 1,000 shopping carts that disappear each week from super markets is the ravine shown here. Food store special agents representing markets in four Southern California counties say their 1,000-a-week area estimate is "probably too conservative." They theorize that the forlorn pair of carts above were abandoned by customers and later shoved into the ravine by vandals.

### 'Cart-Napping' Worries Grocers

Shopping carts, disappearing at a rate of more than 1,000 each week, last year cost food market owners \$1,571,750 in four Southern California counties, an industry spokesman announced.

"In many cases, cart losses cost more than bad checks, burglaries and robberies combined" he added.

A survey covering 534 markets in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino shows losses of 22,290 carts last year. Since these stores account for 40 per cent of food sales in the area, total losses are estimated at 55,725.

Grocers say most of the carts are pushed away by customers who underestimate the cost of the carts and over-estimate the merchant's profit on their business. "These baskets cost us \$32 each; that's equal to our net profit on the food for two large families for a year," claimed one official.

"Cart-napping is a misdemeanor punishable by fine or imprisonment," he continued. "But we don't want to jail our customers. We'd rather appeal to their sense of honesty and fair play."

"What's more, every one of our customers helps pay for the loss in higher prices. I would cut prices tomorrow on dozens of items if I could be sure no more of my carts would get lost."

Where do the carts go? California Food and Drug Special Agents association members, who act as store detectives for their various companies, report: "Some are picked up off the street and 'fenced' to unwarly or unethical merchants. Some hold junk in garages.

"Some are used as laundry carts until they rust up a batch of clothes and then wind up in the trash. Some are torn apart by the kids. Even the carts that come back are costly as they are often damaged. And, for every cart that's in somebody's back yard, the store has to buy an extra one to keep in the store."

Some California cities have

passed special ordinances to control what one citizen called, "the public nuisance, the traffic hazard, the disgrace to the moral character of our city that abandoned shopping carts represent."

Market officials emphasized that customers pay for the lost carts. "You've heard of passing the savings on to the customer—well, we're passing the losses on, too!" cracked one.

Special agents say the name of the owner is stamped into the metal frame of the carts, and declared that "anyone who spots an abandoned cart and notifies the owner is doing a real public service."

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