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Aeon in 24-hour security watch after gang swipes cash machine

RUTH MATHEWSON

Security guards were on 24-hour watch over Aeon Credit Services cash points last night after thieves drove off with a cash machine.

Four machines at Aeon - which produces the Hello Kitty card - have been burgled in three weeks.

Masked men broke into Aeon's glass-fronted Shau Kei Wan lobby about 5am yesterday, ripped out a cash machine, loaded it into a white van and drove off, police said.

It was the first Aeon robbery in which thieves have stolen the whole machine rather than prise out the cash box.

The gang stole the machine without breaking the lobby's glass front. The company would not say how much money was involved.

The alarm worked properly - unlike previous robberies in which the system had been switched off.

"We're still investigating what happened in the past incidents, but for this one our security firm called police," Aeon general manager Derek Lai Yuk-kwong said.

Aeon has closed 127 of its 197 machines between 10pm and 9am and hired a security squad to patrol them since three ATMs at Tsz Wan Shan, Shamshuipo and Ngau Tau Kok were robbed on January 27 and 28.

The Shau Kei Wan machine was hit about an hour after the patrol team had checked it. Aeon would immediately hire about 25 guards to watch ATM

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lobbies overnight, Mr Lai said.

He refused to confirm whether the machine had already been upgraded to include an ink jet, activated by illegal tampering, and other security devices.

The company had upgraded security features in its machines and would speed up the installation of tougher protective covers, he said.



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