

The Oasis Centre - Cornwall

Registered Charity Number 1139355, founded to serve the communities in the parishes of St Columb Major, St Mawgan-in-Pydar, St Eval and St Ervan



Looking Out for Car Security

Number 16 in a series of notes on important issues.

Most people have cars these days. To some, the car is their pride and joy on which attention is constantly lavished. To others, the car is a functional tool demanding minimal attention that gets them from A to B. To all, the car is an expensive item. The loss of our car involves us in cost and huge inconvenience and it pays us to lock it up when it is not in use. We know that criminals are constantly looking for cars to steal and for valuable items left on view to be stolen from cars.

The battle to secure cars from thieves is a never-ending one. A simple lock and key is not sufficient because criminals know how to force the lock or otherwise overcome it. An alarm linked to the door locks is the next protection and this demands a wireless signal to operate it. Criminals have been quick to find that, with the right equipment located nearby, such a wireless signal can be intercepted and copied. Once the owner has walked off, the copied signal can give the criminal immediate access to the vehicle and its contents.

Technology has moved on by the addition of computers to cars. Many alarm systems are now operated by a fob that sends a different series of random numbers to the car's computer, every time the fob is pressed. This makes it pointless for a criminal to copy the signal. To overcome this advance, thieves attempt to jam the signal instead so that the alarm and the locks are not activated when the fob is pressed. Devices, costing as little as £2, purchased over the Internet can do this. The most common ones are electronic house light controls or dimmers.

Police point out that the electronic wavelength of all these devices is very restricted and many will jam car key fobs. Other fobs pressed at the same time can have the same effect. Car thieves can jam a whole area by attaching several such devices to hedges and bushes with clothes pegs. Whole car parks can be jammed in this way.

“Keyless” car entry systems give rise to different considerations. Their signal is unchanging and broadcasts continuously (as long as the battery lasts). Manufacturers have different ranges and signal strengths governing the distance from which the car can be locked or unlocked. This distance can be up to 30 ft. There are copying devices on the market and available to criminals.

Police advice is clear – if the thief cannot jam or copy the alarm signal, he will simply smash a window and take anything you leave on display. Thus, you should always ensure that nothing is left on display in your car. Secondly, you must check that your car has accepted the signal locking it and setting the alarm. With most cars, the indicators will flash. Then you must try the door handle. Do this every time you lock and leave your car.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre - Cornwall