

Apple AirTags connected to cases of stalking, car theft

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Authorities say Apple AirTags, marketed as a way to keep track of easily-lost belongings, are increasingly connected to cases of stalking and car theft.

"The basic utility of them is to track objects or persons, and so it makes sense that someone would use it for nefarious purposes to that end," said Tom Holt, cybersecurity expert and professor in the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University.

More and more cases are popping up around the country. In New York, a model was stalked after someone slipped an AirTag into her coat pocket. In Michigan, a Novi man found one of the trackers on his Dodge Charger in December, Fox 2 reported.

The Dearborn Police Department has seen an uptick in AirTag-related crimes and posted a public safety video on Nextdoor.

"In a traditional stalking case, typically you have people who are making contact or unwanted contact with a victim, repeatedly," Sgt. James Isaacs told Fox 2. "They're following them where they work, where they go to school, where they are going to eat. Using the AirTag is just another way for them to do that in a more surreptitious way."

Rudy Harper, the Detroit Police Department 2nd deputy chief of media relations, said he isn't aware of any cases involving the tracker.

Others are posting on social media about their experiences finding an AirTag on their vehicle.

What are Apple AirTags?

Sold for just \$29, AirTags are just over an inch in diameter and can be slipped into backpacks or on key rings. Then, users can track an AirTag's location on the "Find My" app often used for friends and family to share locations with each other.

It works by sending out a Bluetooth signal, but the process is anonymous

and encrypted to protect users' privacy, the Apple website says.

Not even they know the location of the AirTag or the identity of the device that helps find it, the company says.

"So on the one hand, Apple claims that it is a very secure product, that Apple even isn't aware of the location of the specific AirTag, and that it's all kind of dependent to the user," Holt said. "And so if that's the case, then that is a relatively good thing. But the negative is in terms of the ease of use, the very [small size](#) means that someone, whether you're intimately connected with them or not, can very easily put them into a purse or bag or car, anything that they're interested in following."

What to watch out for

Dearborn police said they've found the quarter-sized devices behind license plates, between car seats and in purses, among other places.

Dodge Chargers are frequently targeted, they noted.

Holt noted that those who have expensive cars and belongings are more at risk of theft, especially if the belongings are noticeable to passersby.

"The high-end luxury car or something that is an overt symbol or an item that somebody would want, then that may increase the potential for someone to put one of those devices on your object for the sake of theft," he said.

In terms of stalking, survivors of domestic violence are most at-risk, Holt said.

"If you're in a relationship with someone, and you feel as though that person is veering into stalking or obsessive behaviors with you, or they're

abusive, then those are also potential signals that a person may be inclined to use one of these tracking tools."

Protection measures

If someone else places an AirTag in your belonging, your iPhone will send you an alert, Apple said, and the AirTag will play a sound to make it easier to find.

If you do find one in your belongings or get a ping from your phone, you should alert your local police.

Privacy implications

Holt said it can be tough to balance the benefits of the Apple AirTag with the potential threats of stalking and theft, as well as the broader implications for privacy.

He said he would consider using one to help make sure his young kids are safe on their walk to school, for example, but he wasn't surprised when he heard that they're being used for criminal activity.

"It's a difficult thing to grapple with the utility of things like AirTags, or even Amazon Alexa as we allow these objects into our homes, and just make them part of our daily routine without really thinking about the broader implications for privacy or what they may be used for," he said.

AirTags are not the first technology device to enter our daily lives, but Holt said it is worth considering possible short and long-term consequences.

"It's almost like, well, everything's out there already, so what's the

point?" Holt said. "But there are some things like this where there are glaring risks that aren't present with other things; stalking and theft are the most immediate ones. ... You used to be able to buy those tiny pen-sized spy cameras or digital voice recorders from SkyMall. So these things have always existed, they're just now easier to use, mass-marketed effectively, and connected to a device much more efficiently than before."

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