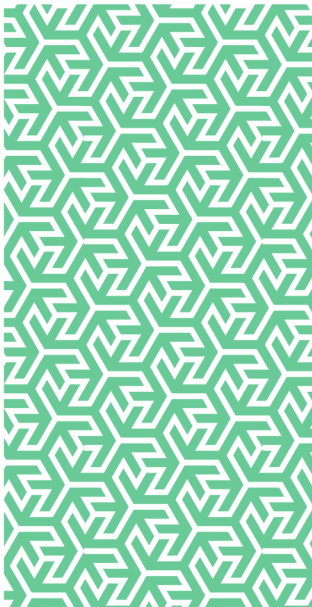




Risk control

Keyless Vehicle Entry Systems – Relay Theft



In partnership with



Keyless Vehicle Entry Systems – Relay Theft

Introduction

Throughout history, the automotive industry has always been one of the most receptive industries to emerging technologies. Technology has defined the way cars are manufactured, operated and maintained. More recently, technology has redefined the way cars use fuel, with electric, hybrid and hydrogen systems displacing the internal combustion engine and gas-fed engines as the driving force of the future.

With new technologies comes the expectation of enhanced luxury, safety and efficiency. One notable advancement of recent decades is introduction of keyless vehicle entry systems.

The first keyless vehicles appeared on the garage forecourts in the mid 1990's. Since that time their popularity has increased and can now be found as standard across vehicle ranges, including commercial and industrial fleets.

The use of keyless vehicle entry systems has provided new opportunity to thieves. Home Office data shows that 129,159 vehicles were stolen in England and Wales for 2023/2024. This compares to 130,119 for the previous year¹. These figures combine thefts both from, and of, vehicles so owners and operators cannot afford to be complacent. The most vulnerable cars were Land Rover, Ford and Lexus.

Vehicle thefts are not the exclusive domain of the luxury car market. Light Commercial Vehicles (LCV) are a prime target for criminals. 'Tracker' research has indicated that bypassing keyless vehicle entry systems accounted for up to 82% of the total number of LCV thefts^{2,3}.

With both the Government and law enforcement agencies asking manufacturers to improve vehicle security it is essential that owners of fleets who maintain vehicles with such entry systems take action to protect them.

When looking to procure fleet vehicles, the security of the vehicles must be one of several key considerations. In addition, we need to ensure that security of vehicles is properly maintained by the operators of those vehicles through the provision of effective information, instruction and guidance.

Criminal Opportunity

The criminal looks at technology and innovation and seeks to exploit weaknesses. They also look to technology to enhance their ability to commit crime.

Sometimes referred to as 'relay theft', criminals use signal boosting technologies to capture a key's signal whilst it is within the home or workplace and transmit it to the

associated vehicle parked nearby. This allows the criminal to enter the vehicle and drive it away.

The signal boosters used are widely available through many well-known and established internet sites and can cost as little as £120.

Criminals can be opportunist and will be looking for the easy target such as the driver who leaves the key in the vehicle or the engine running whilst just 'popping out' quickly to perform a task or whilst warming the vehicle or de-icing windscreens.

Protecting Your Vehicles

It is important for drivers to recognise that the electronic key emits a signal that the car identifies, automatically unlocking the car. This signal also enables the starter system within the vehicle.

To protect vehicles which utilise keyless entry systems, the following risk factors need to be considered:

1 The Parking Area

Most vehicle thefts occur during night-time hours, although this does not preclude thefts during the day. Does the location where you leave the vehicle offer the potential thief a safe environment to operate? Is it well lit? Does it have CCTV close by or even covering the vehicle position?

2 Operating Instructions

The first step in protecting your vehicle is to understand its operational capabilities. Read the operators manual. Some vehicles are supplied with a switch located on the key fob that turns off the electronic signal.

3 Key Storage

The signal emitted by the key can penetrate walls, doors and glass but generally cannot pass through metal. Keeping keys in metal storage containers is likely to prevent relay theft. In the absence of metal containers, at the very least you should ensure that the key is stored as far away from walls and windows as possible, placing as many tangible barriers as possible between the key and the potential location of a person with intent to commit relay theft.

4 Traditional Security Options

Sometimes the use of tried and tested security methods can pay dividends. Devices such as highly visible, good quality steering locks can deter a potential thief to abandon their plans. These are particularly useful if the vehicle is to be left

for some time or is parked in a location that does not benefit from CCTV protection.

5 Faraday Pouches

Buy a faraday pouch. A faraday pouch (signal blocker pouch) can easily be purchased from retailers like Amazon, Halfords and many others for as little as £5. These pouches have a conductive fabric mesh that when secured prevents the vehicle signal being transmitted beyond the pouch. They can be useful in situations where employees are working near to vehicles with keyless entry systems.

6 Employee Incentives

Fleet users also must recognise or be incentivised to look after the vehicle allocated to them. This can be by way of financial penalty, or disciplinary action if the vehicle is stolen by any reasonably preventable means such as opportunist or by signal boosting. Many of these thefts are preventable as many are from unlocked vehicles. Drivers just need to be regularly reminded of their responsibility to protect the asset.

7 Vehicle Tracking

If the thief is successful, you can ensure that their joy is relatively short-lived by fitting a tracking device that can help locate and recover your vehicle quickly. These can be purchased from many retailers and the tracking unit can be hidden within the vehicle to avoid detection.

8 Insurance

You need to ensure that if, despite your best efforts, the vehicle thief is successful you have the right cover in place and that you have consistently met the terms of the insurance contract. Make sure everyone understands any limitations and conditions as the contract may not respond if these are not met. Behaviours such as leaving electronic keys in or near unattended vehicles may lead to difficulty if a subsequent claim for loss is made.

References

- 1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/303551/motor-vehicle-theft-in-england-and-wales/>
- 2 <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/cars/article-11481243/Cars-keyless-technology-twice-likely-stolen.html>
- 3 Tracker: <https://www.tracker.co.uk/tracker-hub/news/popular-car-brands-are-hot-targets-keyless-car-theft>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

contact@mpartners.co.uk



Risk Management Partners

The Walbrook Building
25 Walbrook
London EC4N 8AW

020 7204 1800
rmpartners.co.uk

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