

# Safeguard that laptop now

IT'S 5pm and raining hard in an inner-Melbourne suburb. John's van is parked on the other side of the road from a meeting place and he has been walking heaps of documents over to it.

He loads his laptop in too. Locks up. One more trip inside and he will hit the road. He is to fly overseas in two days with that laptop, now loaded with great stuff.

Coming out with a lucky last armful of documents he sees, even through the pouring rain, the unmistakable glint of a broken window.

Yes. It is his van. Yes, his laptop has gone. And all the vital business-trip info that has not been backed up yet has gone too. It was that bad he cancelled the trip.

"In my time with computers I have only lost an operating system," says David Jackson, who invented the eSafe, Australia's only laptop safe for cars.

"And that took six months before it was any where near back together again! An IT mate spent the first three days solid on it.

"But when you think about it, if you lose data, the problems that follow are almost incomprehensible.

"The security industry has a

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By STEPHEN COOPER

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formula. If you lose your laptop, by the time you get it all back up again you have lost four times its original cost — \$5000 laptop, \$20000 loss."

That is for lost professional time, lost opportunities, and lost motivation. You have to try to retrieve it, then replace it, then rebuild your system and files in a new one.

"Many people still do not back up every day, or often enough," says David. "You are always running late or whatever, and it just doesn't get done."

David describes eSafe as "Australia's first portable/relocatable laptop safe". It locks your laptop into your car, office and home — anywhere there is a securely screwed or bolted-down docking station.

The polycarbonate lightweight safe also has room for a small scanner/printer, cables, mobile phone, wallet and more. Your mobile office.

The safe weighs 3.5 kilograms, and you can carry it around like a locked briefcase, then slide and lock it with an Abloy key into a dock under the rear shelf of a sedan, or the cargo floor of a hatchback, wagon or four-wheel-drive.

If you have one of the most compact computers available, there is a smaller one called Hide-Away which bolts strongly, conveniently and out of sight under the front passenger seat.

You can install either type of safe at home using a dock secured under a desk or behind a metal filing cabinet or even sunk into the floor under an air-conditioning outlet that looks just like another branch of your home heating system.

Although they look like plastic, the safes are made from impact-modified Lexan polycarbonate, which makes the unit virtually indestructible.

"It will withstand incredible abuse — even attacks with a hammer — in an attempt to dismantle it will prove fruitless," says David.

If thieves have time to persist, they may hear themselves starting to do damage to the item inside that they hoped to sell. In most cases for the smash and grab-type thief, a damaged computer is not worth the trouble. There are easier pickings nearby.

So you keep your data. And even if you have a backup, you keep your data private.

The full size eSafe is priced at \$595 with its docking station.

The smaller Hide-away is \$275. Each could seem a pretty heavy investment against an event that is not certain to happen. And your last new laptop probably broke the bank anyway.

To try to get a feel for the range of risks out there, all you can do is look for anecdotal evidence. When pressed for his stories, David showed the bottom line is that anything goes while it is profitable and laptops are easy to take.

There is the story from NSW about a sales representative who was walking around a shopping mall with his laptop. He was spotted by a group of three crooks using mobile phones.

The rep took good care of the laptop and left the mall with it. But the stalkers phoned his description and exit-door location to a fourth ring member waiting in a car outside. It was just a case of following the rep by car until he left the laptop in the vehicle for a moment. Smash. Grab.

When the ring was caught, police found 2000 laptops in the garage. Interestingly, many of them had the sides ripped out from being pulled away from a computer security cable that was wrapped around, say an office desk. They were still valuable



**The eSafe anti-theft device fitted to a hatchback.**

something absolutely secure? “All security is a compromise,” says David. “You could hire a security guard with a gun for 24 hours a day. The crooks just hire a man with a bigger gun. You could hire 10 guards. They hire 20 crooks. If they want what you have got, they will have it.”

In reality your laptop is attractive to a different kind of person; the smash-grab thief, who works fast on easy targets.

“We’ve got a saying,” says David. “We can’t stop the smash. But we can certainly stop the grab.”

To judge the level of protection of this portable safe, one of Australia’s police forces has legislation to allow its mobile use to hold guns, handcuffs and batons when these are not allowed to be taken into certain premises.

The safes are Australian-Made, in Wangaratta. They are not sold in any retail outlet.

Links:

Hide-Away:  
laptopsecurity@hideawaysafe.com.au

Contact:  
scoop1@optushome.com.au

enough to the gang, who would strip them and ship any high-value components overseas.

What is the most common tool used by the smash-and-grab robber?

“Speed,” says David. They are fast. They have time to collect what is loose inside your car,

with the alarm going, and who knows who is going to come round the corner. They are in and gone.

“I heard a story of some kids robbing down on the Esplanade, St Kilda. Three kids; one kid running along smashing all the passenger-side windows with a hammer, two

kids behind him diving in through those windows grabbing what they could. They’d do about 15 vehicles then race off and do another area.”

Then again, someone could take the whole car. Or take your laptop safe from you while you carry it around. Is there