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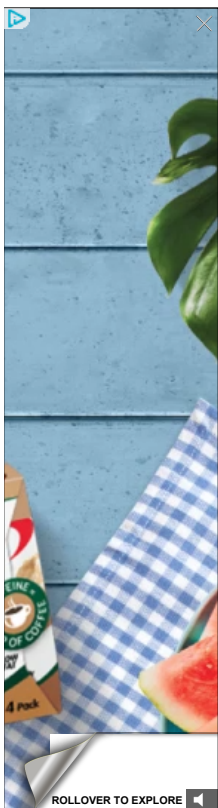
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### TECHNOLOGY NEWS

## Lock picking child's play at major US computer hackers conference

by Staff Writers  
Las Vegas, Aug 6, 2006

Locks commonly used at homes and businesses worldwide were so easy to pick that children could do it, computer hackers practicing the skill were shown on Sunday.

In a Las Vegas casino meeting room devoted to the art of lock picking for the course of a three-day DefCon hackers conference, Marc Tobias and Matt Fiddler demonstrated that all it took to open a lock was a tap and a twist.

Emphatic proof arrived in the form of an 11-year-old girl, who deftly opened typical door locks under the watchful eyes of her mother within minutes of being given a "bump key" and a brief lesson in how to use it.

"That was absolutely my coup," said Tobias, a lawyer and a security consultant that authored Locks, Safes and Security. "I'm putting her picture on my website, along with a video of her doing it."

The type of bump key used by the girl was developed in Denmark long ago and basically was an easily modified key blank, Tobias explained.

Putting bump keys in typical pin tumbler locks and giving them a whack sent shock waves that jarred pins into position for opening, Tobias showed AFP.

"My old friend Isaac Newton 350 years ago figured out bumping," Tobias said, likening it to the principle of every action having an equal and opposite reaction. "It is just that there were no locks with pins in them."

"It's a very simple premise."

Tobias began calling attention to the vulnerability in the United States about two years ago, after colleagues did the same in The Netherlands.

The technique could be used to open almost any lock, from weighty ones used by urban merchants to secure pull-down gates to home door locks and those on the approximately five million US post office boxes, Tobias told AFP.

"These locks are all over the world," Tobias said. "There isn't a lock in France I can't open."

A few companies such as EVVA of Austria make far more secure locks based on sliders or magnets instead of pins, according to Fiddler and Tobias, who opted for those kinds of locks on their homes.

"The problem is that the public doesn't get it," Fiddler said. "They don't know, and the lock manufacturers don't want to tell them."

Tobias, a lawyer who began picking locks for fun at the age of 15, joked that all he wanted was for pin tumbler lock packaging to bear warnings that the devices could be opened by people with little

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skill using basic tools.

"It is inherent in the pin tumbler lock," Tobias said. "If you have real security needs, buy better locks."

Lock picking held an allure for computer hackers, more than 6,000 of which turned out for the 14th annual DefCon conference that ended on Sunday in Las Vegas, according to organizers.

They were curious about how things worked, and then took pride in figuring out how to crack codes and get past software barriers, attendees conceded.

Hackers crammed the room each day to hone lock-picking skills or compete for the title of top lock-picker.

"I was completely dumbfounded that this was possible," DefCon attendee Tom Lappas told AFP as he practiced bumping a lock. "I thought you needed a sledge hammer and chain saw to do this."

"The existence of a room full of people doing this is astounding."

It was vital to know what security could be breached, whether it was a door lock or a computer program, in order to build better defenses, said the 24-year-old California university student.

The US Postal Service was taking action to make post office boxes more secure, and efforts were underway to address the bump key vulnerability in Europe, according to Tobias and Fiddler.

"They are dealing with it in Europe," Tobias said. "The problem is there are a billion locks out there."

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**Computer hackers get lesson on cloning passport, cash card tags**

Las Vegas, Nevada, Aug 6, 2006

High-tech passports touted as advances in national security can be spied on remotely and their identifying radio signals cloned, computers hackers were shown at a conference ending Sunday.



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