

## ALOA RESPONSE

On August 28, ALOA posted a press release regarding recent publicity about the vulnerability of pin tumbler locks through the use of the bump key. Although not named, ALOA was clearly pointing the finger at myself and my associates who have made public the security issues from bumping that affect most mechanical cylinders. Because of the position taken by ALOA, I felt obligated to respond.

First, their press release:

The Associated Locksmiths of America (ALOA) says that consumers have been unduly alarmed by attention-seeking individuals who have used the media to create a panic over recent reports of the use of Bump Keys to commit burglaries. However, because of the widespread distribution of this information through various media, it now has the potential to become a real security threat to consumers.

The technique of using Bump Keys is one of many methods used by locksmiths over the past 75 years to open locks for which there is either a cylinder malfunction or a lost key. There are, in fact, many ways to prevent this method of opening so it is not a first-line technique that is used by professional locksmiths.

Initially the individuals who promoted this information to the press may have been making what ALOA perceives as a mis-guided attempt at consumer awareness. They gave the impression that opening locks by Key Bumping was a wide-spread problem. It certainly has not been a method used by most burglars for many reasons. However, now that this method of opening some locks has become a popular theme, the most probable effect will be to stimulate the interest of would-be burglars to attempt to Bump Open locks!

For consumers who are concerned whether their locks or premises are susceptible to this or any other form of burglary attack, ALOA recommends that they consult an ALOA Certified Locksmith and ask for recommendations for improving security. For information regarding the closest ALOA Certified Locksmith go to [www.aloa.org](http://www.aloa.org) or call ALOA at 800-532-2562.

### **The ALOA Position**

From their brief statement, ALOA evidently believes the following to be true:

I and others (including some locksmiths) have made information public that was heretofore secret and unknown to the general public;  
We made statements that burglaries have resulted from the use of bump keys in an effort to scare and “unduly alarm” the public;  
The public does not need to know about bumping, nor that they are at risk;  
Bumping poses a serious threat to security;  
The recent publicity will only serve to education criminals.

ALOA clearly believes that “security through obscurity” should be the rule. If nobody knows about a problem, then it does not pose a threat. And we need to kill the messenger who carries the message. That will surely take care of the problem! Unfortunately, the criminals have known about bumping for quite some time. Following the ALOA logic, they and the locksmiths are the only ones that should understand the problem and inherent risks.

## **The Facts**

Since 2004, there has been a huge amount of publicity in Europe and on the Internet about bumping, including many videos showing how to open locks.

ALOA was well aware that I was interviewed on our statewide CBS affiliate in 2004 and 2005 with regard to bumping and the vulnerability of post office and UPS mail box locks. In addition, I wrote an article on the subject in Keynotes in 2005.

In December, 2005, I began consulting with the Postal Inspection Service regarding the vulnerability of their locks to bypass by bumping. I believe this is a serious problem and needed to be urgently addressed due to the increased publicity that bumping was receiving in Europe and on the Internet. I waited four months before publishing a report in order to give the postal service time to respond. They did not request that I not publish my report. In fact, some management level postal employees advocated that I should make the findings public so that enough attention would be drawn to the issue that something could be accomplished in Washington. I also recommended that the postal laws be changed to prevent the trafficking in pre-cut bump keys.

In March, 2006, a detailed report was issued by Consumers Reports in the Netherlands. This report detailed the test results that were obtained in evaluating about seventy lock manufacturers and was a joint collaboration between the police, consumer reports and the Dutch sports lock picking group, known as TOOOL. That article stated that a majority of the locks could be opened without difficulty. As a result of that publication and after consulting with a number of manufacturers in March at Cologne, I posted a White Paper on [www.security.org](http://www.security.org) that detailed the real threat from bumping.

In July and August, I lectured in New York and Las Vegas at the international hacker conventions. According to ALOA, these are gatherings of criminals and persons of “questionable character.” The fact is, most attendees are corporate IT professionals, security managers and government agents. I lectured with a security expert from a Fortune 100 company in Las Vegas, and one of the leading experts on bumping at the New York conference.

As a result of these and other speeches, a tremendous amount of publicity was generated. Why? Because the security vulnerability of pin tumbler locks affects just about everyone, and it did not take the news media long to figure it out, especially when a young girl demonstrated opening a popular lock in seconds with no prior experience. I challenge ALOA to produce one article or press release that stated that criminals had utilized bumping to effect entry! The media has asked for such information, but it has not happened, even with the publicity for the past two years. Bumping is a real threat, but there is a remedy. Just install better locks. Nobody has said that there is an outbreak of burglaries, but there surely could be, and that is precisely the issue. The locksmith, in my view, should be proactive and suggest, where appropriate, an upgrade to better locks. Of course, there is a problem in doing this, as I am sure ALOA recognizes: the locksmith would have to admit that they knew, but said nothing about the vulnerability in the locks that they have been selling. But then, perhaps ALOA should be the one to respond to that issue.

The real question for ALOA is why they have not been pushing the lock manufacturers to deal with this problem, given that they have known about it for many years. The illogic is striking. If ALOA and their members have known that they have been selling and installing locks that could be easily bypassed, why would they continue to do so and place their customers at risk? The short answer, but not a good one, is that ALOA prevents its members from disclosing defects in any detail to the public. Why would that be? Surely it could not be linked to revenues received from those very same manufacturers and institutional organizations who are concerned with their embedded base of assets, which could be at risk!

For ALOA to state that the technique of bumping was not public information prior to July is untrue. Evidently, ALOA and some locksmiths believe that there are still secrets and that the public does not have a right to know about vulnerabilities in the locks that they purchase and rely upon for security. The reality is that there are no more secrets! The Internet took care of all of that.

ALOA prevents locksmiths from disclosing security vulnerabilities to the public, to their detriment. I have advocated, as a lawyer, that this is bad public policy, irrational, and will ultimately lead to liability on the part of both the locksmith and ALOA. The public relies upon the locksmith as their first line of security. When they sell cheap locks, such as the Kwikset that the eleven year old girl opened in seconds, then they have an obligation to warn the prospective purchaser of the risks in using such products. By doing that, they are acting responsibly, meeting their legal obligations, and most importantly, fulfilling their ethical duty. I know some locksmiths disagree with me on this point, and made their views known two years ago after I posted an editorial in Keynotes on the subject of full disclosure. But at the end of the day, full disclosure is the best policy. An educated consumer is a better customer, and a more secure one.

ALOA's contention that the public does not have a right or a need to know is irresponsible and irrational. The public, not the locksmith, should be making security decisions based upon a full understanding of the risks. This means that they should understand how easy or difficult it is to open a cylinder, then make their own judgment as to whether that cylinder provides sufficient security. A failure to disclose security vulnerabilities will subject the locksmith to civil liability for misrepresentation and negligence, should there be a loss or injury resulting from the failure of the locks that were recommended by him.

Rather than attacking "misguided individuals" for making a problem public, which ALOA has now admitted is a significant security threat to everyone, they should be taking the lead to deal with the real problem. Specifically, I would urge them to:

- Change their rules to allow locksmiths to educate the public in security vulnerabilities of their products;
- Form an industry-wide consortium of manufacturers to improve the current technology to prevent bumping;
- Educate the consumer with regard to the availability of high security locks;
- Encourage and work with sport lock picking groups to identify security vulnerabilities. It will help everyone, and the fact is, these groups are now operating in America;
- Join me in proposing legislation to prohibit the sale of pre-cut bump keys through interstate commerce. Currently, postal regulations specifically exempt bump keys from all such prohibitions;
- Work with UL and other standards organizations to insure that their high security ratings encompass bumping;
- Work with lock manufacturers and encourage them to provide warnings on their product packaging that alerts the public about security vulnerabilities in their locks;
- Propose legislation that makes the possession of bump keys by unauthorized individuals equivalent to possession of burglary tools;

In my view, ALOA and every locksmith should recognize that bumping is perhaps the most efficient method of bypass of a conventional pin tumbler cylinder. Virtually every cylinder is at risk. They should address the issue head-on and educate the public to upgrade their locks, where warranted. The locksmith is the first line of defense, and bumping can provide a real opportunity to serve the public and enhance their security. They should embrace that potential.