



Criminal Exploitation of AirTags and Other Location Devices

In early 2021, Samsung released the SmartTag and SmartTag+, both of which utilize Bluetooth technology to pinpoint the location of an object the device is attached to. The SmartTag+ also utilizes ultra-wideband technology to provide greater accuracy ([Samsung News Room](#)). On April 30, 2021, Apple released their version of the tracking device called AirTag. With the assistance of the "Find My" app on mobile and computer devices, AirTags use an anonymous and encrypted Bluetooth signal to track connected devices ([Apple](#)). Criminals are exploiting these tags by placing them on "goods" they are looking to obtain or have already acquired so they can track the movement.

Drugs

AirTags and other similar devices have been used to track drug shipments. On October 30, 2021, a Sheriff's deputy with St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana conducted a routine traffic stop that resulted in the seizure of marijuana and methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA). The deputy discovered an AirTag after hearing a beeping sound coming from the seized items. He also received an alert on his phone informing him of an "unknown AirTag" moving with him ([U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "Border Intelligence Daily" Bulletin](#)).

Vehicles

Between September 2021 and December 2021, York Regional Police in Canada reported five incidents where AirTags were placed on luxury vehicles parked in public parking lots. The perpetrators tracked the vehicles to the owner's residences where they then broke in and stole them ([Business Insider](#)).



According to Michigan's Dearborn Police Department, AirTags have been used to track vehicles for potential larceny and auto theft. Police have located these devices behind license plates, between and underneath car seats, and in people's personal items, such as purses and jackets ([Nextdoor](#)). Other agencies have also reported finding AirTags underneath vehicles and inside the gas tank cap.

Stalking

On December 27, 2021, a Mississippi female reported receiving a notification on her phone that said, "Unknown Accessory Detected. This item has been moving with you for a while. The owner can see its location." She received the first notification at 1:47 PM, while she was at the park with her family, and again at 3:08 PM, while she was at home. She was able to disable the tracking but was unable to locate the device ([Fox News](#)).



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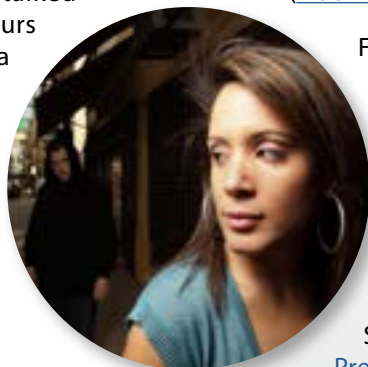
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Video

On January 5, 2022, in New York City, New York, a swimsuit model was stalked for approximately five hours by someone who put a tracker in the pocket of her coat. She realized she was being stalked after receiving an alert on her phone stating an “unknown accessory” was traveling with her ([NY Post](#)).



still allow them to track the device’s location ([Mac Rumors](#)).

For Android users, Apple created an application called Tracker Detect that scans the surroundings for unknown AirTags. Samsung released a feature called Unknown Tag Search through their SmartThings Find ecosystem, which scans for unknown Galaxy SmartTags ([Samsung Mobile Press](#)). For additional security from unwanted tracking, AirTags are designed to play a sound when they are away from their owner for a certain amount of time ([Business Insider](#)).

These trackers pose a potential threat to law enforcement officials. They could easily be placed on patrol or personal vehicles, especially if they are not parked in a secure location, and used to determine the location of personal residences or to follow day-to-day activities.

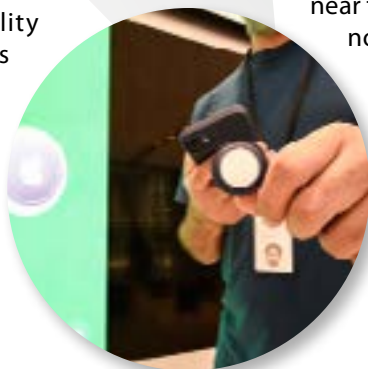
Now What?

If an unknown AirTag is located, the device’s information can be looked up by holding an iPhone or other Near-Field Communication (NFC) capable smartphone near the white side of the AirTag until a notification appears. After tapping the notification, a website will open providing information on the AirTag, including its serial number. The information can then be used to author a search warrant to Apple ([Apple Law Enforcement Portal](#)).

Safety

When AirTags were first released, there was concern over individual safety. To address this, Apple added a feature that notifies individuals if an unknown AirTag is in their vicinity.

The individual can disable the AirTag by tapping the notification and following the provided instructions. This stops the AirTag from sharing its location. AirTag owners have the ability to pause or disable this feature, but only when the device is shared using Apple’s Family Sharing. Turning off the feature will prevent a family member’s phone from receiving alerts for an unknown AirTag, but



About the Author:

Jennifer Rodems currently works as a Criminal Intelligence Analyst and Accounting Fraud Examiner for Rocky Mountain Information Network (RMIN), analyzing case documents and preparing demonstratives in support of law enforcement criminal investigations throughout the RMIN region. During her eleven-year career as an analyst, Jennifer has worked approximately 120 felony cases, including homicide, sexual exploitation, robbery, and fraud/embezzlement. Jennifer teaches classes on human trafficking, as well as instructs member agencies and colleagues on how to produce case presentations and other analytical products.



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