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Computers on Wheels ... Can Be Hacked

Today's cars possess anywhere from 30 to 100 microprocessors (onboard mini-computers), and whenever computers are involved, hacking is a threat. It has been demonstrated that hackers can exploit vulnerabilities in a vehicle's wireless communication functions; within a mobile device connected to a vehicle via USB, Bluetooth, or Wi-Fi; and other third-party means.

Hackers may be able to gain access to personal information and wreak havoc with it. In a worst-case scenario, they can even remotely disable a vehicle's brakes, shut off the engine, commandeer the accelerator, and cause a crash.

Thankfully, there has not yet been a recorded incident of a hacker causing a vehicle crash. A great degree of skill and time would be required to pull it off, but it is possible—a frightening thought. If or when it happens, the issue of liability emerges.

Accident liability would initially fall on the driver of the hacked vehicle. The driver would need to show that their vehicle was hacked, and that they took all necessary measures to prevent it. For instance, an automaker might issue a vehicle recall related to onboard computer vulnerabilities. If the driver/owner was aware of and ignored the recall, he/she would likely be liable for injuries and damages.

Automakers have a duty to keep consumers safe. If the automaker knew (or should have known) of a potential hazard but did nothing to fix it, they may be held liable. Of course, the hackers themselves would be subject to criminal and civil liability; however, tracking them down could prove difficult.

If you have been harmed by a vehicle defect, contact an auto product liability attorney to protect your rights. •



Building Wins Statewide Award

When Bob Bergin and I bought a lot that had a dilapidated warehouse on it on Datura Street in Downtown West Palm Beach, we were focused on its excellent location. It was only two blocks from the Federal Courthouse, two blocks from the State Courthouse and two blocks from City Place. Although the neighborhood was “rough”, we believed that the inevitable development between Clematis and City Place would improve the surrounding buildings but we were not just concerned with our new building.



One of the things we insisted on was bringing in landscaper, Joanne Davis, one of the representatives of A Thousand Friends of Florida. Under her able advice and direction, all our landscaping is comprised of native Florida plants. The photograph doesn't show the entire lot, but the entire lot is Florida native plants such as Gumbo Limbos, Cabbage Palms, Golden Creepers and too many more to name. It has become a small lush lot in an otherwise cement and asphalt jungle. (We even had our own resident Coopers Hawk for a while).

We have just received word that the building landscaping received the Florida Native Plant Society Landscape Award of Honor for Commercial Category.

The use of native plants decreases water use, attracts bees, birds and other pollinators and prevents the extinction of useful plant and tree varieties which are important to diversity. We are very pleased to receive this award and recommend highly the talents of Joanne Davis. ●

Those Pesky ‘Little Flies’



One minute you're outdoors enjoying a pleasant summer evening. The next, you're slapping your arms and legs silly. Mosquitoes have crashed the party.

A mosquito “bites” with a long, pointy mouthpart called a proboscis. One tube in the proboscis draws blood from a capillary; a second one administers saliva that acts as a painkiller and anti-coagulant. An allergic response to the saliva causes swelling and itching afterward.

Only female mosquitoes suck blood. They need it to help their eggs develop. If they had their druthers, they'd stick to nectar like the males.

Mosquitoes are drawn to people by carbon-dioxide emissions, which are detected by receptors on their antennae. Those who inhale and exhale more frequently (e.g., larger people and pregnant women) will be targeted more often. Also, the more heat a person emits, the more likely they are to attract mosquitoes.

Sweat plays a role, too. Our skin produces over 300 chemical odors, some of which mosquitoes find alluring. Mosquitoes also have an affinity for beer drinkers, who have elevated ethanol levels in their sweat.

More ominously, mosquitoes are carriers of some of humanity's most deadly illnesses, such as malaria, yellow fever, encephalitis, and dengue, to name a few. Worldwide, they contribute to millions of deaths each year. And all they need to perpetuate the misery is a tiny amount of standing water to lay their eggs.

To be fair, mosquitoes possess a couple of redeeming qualities: They are a plentiful source of food for many creatures, and the design of their proboscis is being studied to develop less painful hypodermic needles and insertion methods. Beyond that, engendering goodwill toward mosquitoes is a difficult assignment. ●

Happy Birthday, Social Security!



When the Social Security Act was signed into law in August 1935 by President Franklin Roosevelt, it wasn't a completely new idea. Following the Civil War, war veterans rendered disabled as a consequence of their service, war widows, and now-fatherless children numbered hundreds of thousands. A pension program was established to help them—a precursor to the Social Security Act.

(As of early 2019, a daughter of a Civil War veteran was still receiving Civil War benefits! For the record, her father was 83 years old when she was born and had married a woman over 50 years his junior.)

Significant factors besides the Great Depression led to the Social Security Act. Extended families, who all chipped in to care for elderly family members, began to wither. Many family members headed to the cities in

the early 1900s to find work, weakening this social construct. Also, between 1900 and 1930, life expectancy improved by 10 years; those who needed assistance were requiring it for a longer span.

Initially, minorities and women were denied Social Security benefits—a sign of the times—as were many who were employed in social service sectors. Through 1940, recipients received lump-sum payments; monthly payments began thereafter.

Since 1961, workers can choose to begin collecting early Social Security at age 62 at a permanently reduced monthly rate (instead of full retirement at age 65, 66, or 67). Permanently increased monthly benefits can be collected if you wait until age 70. But here's a little secret: No matter when you begin to draw Social Security, you'll be at roughly the same payout total at age 79, the age of average U.S. life expectancy. Something to consider when pondering your retirement decision. •

August 2019 Notable Dates

August 2 – National Coloring Book Day –
Don't feel you need to stay within the lines.

August 4 – National Friendship Day –
Who haven't you seen in a while?

August 8 – National Happiness Happens Day –
Recognize and celebrate what makes you happy!

August 15 – National Lemon Meringue Pie Day – Eat; don't throw.

August 19 – National Aviation Day – Also the birthday of Orville Wright!

August 24 – National Waffle Day –
Don't be undecided about whether you want some.

August 28 – National Bow Tie Day – Look proper for a nice day out.

August 31 – National Trail Mix Day – Go goofy for gorp!





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Focus and Patience Required in School Zones

By the time late August rolls around, many school zones are once again bustling with activity: students walking/bicycling to school, parents picking up or dropping off their kids, and buses delivering or gathering their precious cargo.

But despite lowered speed limits, marked crosswalks, signage, and warning lights to improve school-zone safety, some drivers don't pay attention or abide by the law. According to the Transportation Research Board, nationwide approximately 100 students are killed annually in school-zone accidents, and roughly 25,000 are injured.

Distracted driving and speeding are frequent culprits in school-zone accidents. Studies have shown that distracted driving is as dangerous as driving intoxicated. As for speed, traveling 10 mph over a school-zone speed limit of 25 mph increases stopping distance by nearly 40 feet in normal conditions. Additionally, parents who drop off or pick up their kids at non-designated areas often force them to navigate traffic.

School kids can make things dicey, too. Cell phone usage or listening to music can distract them while crossing the street. Students may cross at unmarked areas instead of designated crosswalks. Or, they cross where they're supposed to but mistakenly assume a distracted driver will stop.

Drivers shoulder the lion's share of responsibility for school-zone accidents. Student pedestrians will be held to a lower standard of conduct—in circumstances in which an adult pedestrian may be found partially responsible for an accident, a child pedestrian frequently will not be. A parent or guardian will need to file a personal injury claim on behalf of an injured child.

If your child is injured in a school-zone accident, contact a personal injury attorney to protect their rights. ●

