

[REDACTED]  
**Bandera, Texas** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

January 13, 2015

✓ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
West Building  
Washington, DC 20590

INFORMATION Redacted PURSUANT TO THE FREEDOM OF  
INFORMATION ACT (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 552(B)(6)

U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith  
2409 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

State Sen. Troy Fraser  
500 Chestnut Street #810  
Abilene, TX 79602

JAN 22 2015

State Rep. Andrew Murr  
Post Office Box 125  
Junction, Texas 76849

To the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Rep. Smith, Sen. Fraser & Rep. Murr:

I recently found myself unable to get out of a rented Toyota Prius and later a 2013 Ford Focus because of electronically operated door locks that make the interior door-open levers inoperative. Looking on the Internet I see others have had similar experiences: See the enclosed first hand reports of others trapped in automobiles or other motor vehicles because of modern motor vehicle door locking systems.

I first became aware of this in a car I rented in Europe a few years ago: If I used the wireless remote control to lock the doors while I was sitting in the driver's seat, all interior door levers and window controls became inoperative, and there was no way for me to get out of the vehicle without using the wireless remote control to first unlock the doors (unless perhaps I was able to smash a window).

According to one of the enclosed reports I found on the Internet, the same systems in some vehicles also disable the vehicle's horn, preventing a person trapped in the vehicle from alerting others who may be nearby.

On October 24, 2014, I used the wireless remote control to unlock the doors and got in the back seat of a rented Toyota Prius to retrieve an item from luggage beneath the hatchback, closing the door behind me. Although I made no effort to lock the doors, the doors locked, and I found the door levers on both rear doors were inoperative. Later I looked and saw the child locks were on, which was why this happened. However, I was still unable to get out of the car when I crawled into the front right (passenger) seat and pulled on the door lever. This was true regardless of which position the lock-unlock lever next to the door-open lever was in. I panicked at this point and don't specifically recall

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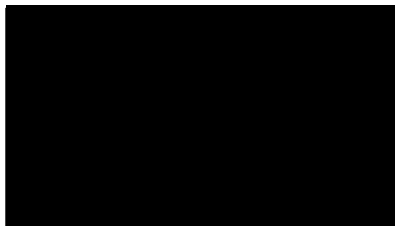
pulling on the driver's door open lever. However, I probably did, trying the door-open lever with the lock-unlock lever in each position. I had the "key" in my pocket that is detected wirelessly by the car's electronic system and pushed the START button while holding the brake peddle down. The ignition came on, and I was then able to open the driver's door. But what if I'd gotten in the car and didn't have the wireless "key" with me? My only hope of getting out of the car without assistance from others would be kicking out a window. Some people would not be strong enough to do that.

On December 30, 2014 in Sarasota, Florida, I got in the back seat of a 2013 Ford Focus that had been parked in the sun, so the interior of the car was hot. The electric window control didn't work. Fortunately, the ignition was still off, so the door lever opened the door when I pulled on it. Later that day in the back seat of the same car we stopped at a red light, and to test it I pulled on the back seat interior door-open lever and found it inoperative. The next day, on December 31, 2014, after exiting the right front door of this same 2013 Ford Focus I reached inside the car to the interior right rear door lever and pulled on it and found it was inoperative, but the door opened when I pulled on the exterior door handle. I thought the purpose of motor vehicle door locks is to lock people out of the car, but today's motor vehicle door locking systems lock or trap people in the vehicle.

This type of motor vehicle door locking system is a life-threatening safety hazard, particularly on hot, sunny summer days. I understand the need for child locks on rear doors, but the interior door-open levers on motor vehicle front doors should always function, and so should the interior rear door-open levers if the child locks have not been flipped on. Disabling all interior door-open levers may make theft of or from a motor vehicle more difficult, but in my opinion the risk of trapping persons inside the vehicle is a more important concern.

I urge all of you to take appropriate steps to remedy this safety hazard. Motorists should be warned of this hazard, and motor vehicle recalls to make motor vehicle door locks function reliably should be considered.

Respectfully,



enclosures

accessed January 1, 2015

[screen name: ]

Delivery Date: 08 Sep 2011

OK, I feel like an idiot, but I'll describe a problem I had today at the airport because someone else might benefit from it. As I approached the departure area to drop my daughter off, cars were double-parked, dropping people and then pulling out, weaving between other cars. I pulled in mostly in the "double-park lane" if there is such a thing, waiting for space closer to the curb. When it looked like it would open up in a few seconds I told my daughter to hop out but not get her luggage out of the hatch until I pulled over closer. The security guard was giving me the evil eye and waving me to get over. My daughter got out and the car that had been blocking my way moved out so I started to pull farther right, only the car wouldn't go. I couldn't figure out why. I stepped on the accelerator and still it wouldn't move. I moved the gear lever to make sure it was in drive, but succeeded only in putting it in ECO. Still it wouldn't move. Then I couldn't figure out how to get it back in drive, but thought it should still move in ECO. I sat dumbstruck for a few seconds thinking it was a problem with the shift lever. I saw the parking brake light was on so I hit the brake release but it still wouldn't move. I hit it again, then again and again maybe 20 times, pounding harder each time but the brake just wouldn't release. The guard was waving at me more urgently because I was partially blocking the through lane and my daughter was looking at me like I was crazy, waiting for me to pull over. I was near panic. I stepped on the accelerator hard trying to override the drag from the parking brake like you can do in a gas car, but that didn't work. I decided to just get out of the car and hoped the removal of the key would reset things, but I couldn't get out. The door was locked! I yanked on the handle a couple of times, getting more frustrated. If this had been a situation of being stuck on the railroad tracks I would have died for sure. I couldn't move and couldn't get out. Then I looked at the dash again. The brake light was still on, so I tried releasing the parking brake yet again but as I did so I saw a little message right in the center saying to step on the brake. Step on the brake in order to go forward? I don't remember ever reading or hearing about that. I tried it and the parking brake had finally released! Thank god some programmer thought to display that message on the dash, or I might still be stuck there. My daughter was looking at me with even greater concern now, gesturing like what is going on. The guard started to approach my car. I finally pulled over enough to clear the lane and the guard was satisfied. My daughter went to the back of the car to get her bag but she couldn't open the hatch. I thought she just didn't know how to push the button, so I tried to get out to help her but I still couldn't get out! I yanked on the door handle hard twice but it wouldn't open. I was ready to scream. Then I pushed the little unlock button on the door and got out, and then the hatch lid opened too. She got on her way shaking her head mumbling "Uhhhnn, My dad!" under her breath.

I have no idea how the parking brake got set, as I have no memory of setting it. Maybe when she jumped out the brake set automatically or maybe I did set it by habit when I came to the initial stop even though I intended to pull over farther in a few seconds. I guess this is the first time in a year and a half I've tried to release the emergency brake when trying to move. I normally release the brake within the first second of starting the car, when my foot is already on the brake, all as one practiced motion. I knew I had to brake to start the car, but I didn't know that I had to have my foot on the brake in order to release the emergency brake. It seems counterintuitive to me and a significant safety problem. Worse is the fact that the door wouldn't open when I yanked on the handle. Again, if I had been stuck on the tracks, I'd have died. In a panic situation, people just pull on the door handle to get out. They don't look for the right button in a sea of buttons.

The car should be designed so that if someone pulls on the inside door handle while the car is stopped and the fob is in the car, the door should open every time, no matter what. That's an escape situation.

OK, have a good laugh. I should have known better after driving the car for 18 months, but I still think there is a serious design problem here.

...

[Rat on 08 Sep 2011:]

My Acura definitely releases the parking brake when I press on the accelerator and the car is in gear but the Leaf did not today. I was definitely stepping on the accelerator several times while the car was in gear with the brake not releasing. If I had been mistakenly pressing on the brake, the parking brake would have released since I was pushing down on the brake release lever at the same time. The more serious error, though, is not allowing the door to open when the handle is pulled up. I can see that if the car is in motion to prevent a child or even pet from jumping out, or if the fob is not in the car, since a thief might have broken a window and reached in, but if it's stopped and the key in it, the door should be openable. I think someone stuck on the tracks or sinking into deep water isn't going to be looking for the power on button or door unlock button, they're going to be pulling on the handle.

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[REDACTED]  
accessed January 1, 2015

Help! I'm trapped in my car and can't get out!  
02-07-2013 02:47 AM #1

I was watching The Weather Channel to get the forecast about the upcoming snow storm on Friday. After the forecast, they had a segment about driving in a snow storm and what to have on in case you have to stay in your car for a period of time.

So, the presenter showed some obvious stuff like a blanket, flashlight and a wind up radio. Then she said in case you're out of fuel and/or the battery is dead so the power windows and the ELECTRIC POWER lock button don't work, showed one of those emergency hammer. So you can break the windows and get out.

Come again? She knows you can manually unlock the door and get out right? She knows about that chrome shiney thingie by the door release handle in the Toyota Highlander she's in right? Just turn it 90 degrees and voila, the door is unlocked so you can get out. No need to use the power lock button. No need to break the windows if the power lock button doesn't work and you need to get out to do a #1.

Or in some European cars that where the lock pin is flush with the door card when locked, just pull the release handle twice. Once to pop the lock pin and the a second time to open the door.

Then I thought, what about those cars with the electric door releases. Such as the current C6 Vette (C7????), the latter models of the first gen Vipers with the exterior door handle, the Caddy CTS Coupe and the Caddy XLR.

But she said "dead battery" and "electric door lock". Heck, I don't think she knows about the Vipers, Corvette and Cadillacs.

BTW, does any of those cars have some sort of fail safe mechanisms if the battery died? An mechanical emergency release? I guess in the Vette, you can always crawl into the hatch and manually release the the hatch?

Last edited by [REDACTED]; 02-07-2013 at 02:54 AM.

[REDACTED]  
accessed January 1, 2015

Push for door release mechanism after driver trapped in Audi

Date

January 10, 2014

[REDACTED]  
Motoring Writer

The pitfalls of electronic car keys

[REDACTED] explains the glitches in electronic keys in new car models and recounts his own story about his family being locked inside their Porsche.

Motorists have called on car manufacturers to redesign deadlocks after a woman claimed she was trapped in her car on a 41-degree day.

Queensland businesswoman [REDACTED] was stuck in her Audi Q3 after an apparent problem with its locking mechanism that prevented the doors and windows opening.

NRMA Motoring and Services operations manager Tim Moggridge said that almost 2300 people in NSW contacted them after they or their children were trapped inside cars last financial year.

[REDACTED] found herself trapped in her car when it locked itself with her inside.

Trapped in her car: [REDACTED] found herself stuck in her Audi Q3.

Mr Moggridge said that the vast majority of them were children and that a car that could not be opened with the driver and key inside was "something we haven't heard of".

Audi is examining what happened to [REDACTED] car.

Gold Coast resident and fellow Audi driver [REDACTED] said manufacturers need to reconsider security mechanisms fitted to new cars.

Security scrutiny: NRMA has received 2300 reports of people stuck in their cars.

Security scrutiny: NRMA has received 2300 reports of people stuck in their cars. Photo: Supplied

[REDACTED] accidentally locked his [REDACTED]-year-old daughter and [REDACTED] year-old son in his Audi Q7 SUV on December 30.

The children were not able to leave the car because of a deadlock function in its security system.

'A neighbour knocked on the door saying 'You've locked your children in the car,''' he said. 'They were screaming and carrying on.

'My daughter smacked her hand into the dashboard. She had blood on her hands.'

██████████ said cars should have an emergency unlock or door release function to prevent people from being locked in cars.

Other motorists with cars built by BMW, Subaru and Volkswagen told Fairfax Media of similar experiences.

A Royal Automobile Club of Victoria spokesman said the service, on average, rescued four people per day from cars in Victoria.

A spokeswoman for the NRMA said roadside assistance crews in NSW and the ACT were called out to about 2000 cases of people, mainly children, trapped inside cars in the 2012-13 financial year - a 12 per cent increase on the previous year.

National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council executive director Ray Carroll said people were often trapped in cars because of deadlocks that were intended to deter thieves.

'As far as we're concerned, they are a good idea,' he said. 'Many people smash a window to gain access to a car [but] if it's deadlocked they can't open the car - from that perspective, it's a good idea.

'In many cars, if you press the remote it locks the doors but you can still open the doors from the inside. Then, if you double press the remote then it does not open from the inside.'

██████████ says he intends to disable the deadlock in his car and urged manufacturers to consider revising their systems.

'This is a serious issue, and it's not just Audi,' he said. What to do if you're locked in your car

Once you've pressed every button and established the door handle won't open the door the next step is to check the owner's manual. Look under "door locks" or "boot release" or "emergency"; while there may be nothing that will help you out, some cars also have a way to get out using non-traditional methods.

Many modern cars have a manual release system for the boot or tailgate. They're primarily for stopping people getting locked in boots (ignore the Hollywood myths) and usually involve pressing a button or pulling a lever to open the boot. But they're often not too obvious, especially if you're not actually in the boot.

If you've got a phone many cars offer a roadside assistance service and the operator may have some handy advice for the specific model you're stuck in.

If you've decided your only option is to smash a window, don't bother using your hands or feet. Unless you've got a sizeable diamond ring or steel-tipped boots the chances are you won't be able to smash the window. So look for something sharp in the car (the tip of the key, for example) and apply plenty of force; windows are surprisingly strong.

If all else fails call the police on 000 (triple zero)

Smart keys

Many modern cars - even affordable models from mainstream brands - have smart keys or proximity keys that can be sensed by the car. It means the key can be left in a pocket or bag but the car still opened and started if the key is within a certain range (usually about one metre) of the vehicle.

For the most part they're a great feature and will likely see the end of conventional car keys within a few years.

But they can create their own frustrations and failures typical of modern electronics.

Because they're not attached to the car while you're driving, they can get lost or slide down the side of a seat. So while you can still start and drive the car, you can't lock it or leave it securely until you find the key.

Similarly, while most cars these days warn you when the key is taken out of the car (when the original driver leaves the car, for example) there can be occasions when someone drives to their destination only to remember the key is in the pocket of the previous driver.

Smart keys can succumb to interference from other electronic items or when the car is in certain locations (where there are a lot of radio waves, for example). So the car sometimes won't recognise them and either fail to unlock the doors or open. If that occurs all will have either a physical key built into them (it usually slides out) or an area of the car with the key can be placed to allow it to start.

Some cars also warn people not to store their smart key near any implanted medical devices, such as pacemakers - not for the sake of the key, but for the operation of the medical device.

- with [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]  
January 1, 2015

woman locked inside Audi Q3 on 41-degree day

Date

January 9, 2014

[REDACTED]  
Motoring writer

The pitfalls of electronic car keys

[REDACTED] explains the glitches in electronic keys in new car models and recounts his own story about his family being locked inside their Porsche.

Do you know more? Email us, message us on Twitter [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] only wanted to go home for lunch, but within minutes of stepping into her Audi Q3 in Noosa last Saturday, she found herself trapped in the car and struggling to breathe.

I was a wreck. I nearly died

The keyless-entry car had locked her in. It was 41 degrees outside, she was in a car park and she did not have a phone to call for help. [REDACTED] found herself trapped in her car when it locked itself with her inside.

[REDACTED] found herself trapped in her car when it locked itself with her inside.

"I got in, shut the door, went to press the start button and a message came up, saying 'key not identified'," [REDACTED], said.

"All the doors locked themselves. I thought, 'That's not good' ... I tried to wind the windows down and open the doors. When that didn't work I started to panic. I was trapped.

"Within a couple of minutes I was struggling to breathe inside the car, because it was parked in the sun."

The 2012 Audi Q3, like the one that [REDACTED] drives.

The 2012 Audi Q3, like the one that [REDACTED] drives.

She began waving to passers-by and bashing on the car windows for help. After about 12 minutes, she caught the attention of a man walking past, who managed to open the door from the outside.

Audi spokeswoman Anna Burgdorf said there were no known faults with the Q3's locking mechanism and Audi had towed the car away to investigate what had happened.

[REDACTED] said she wanted to know what had gone wrong with the car. She had not driven it since and said the incident could have been tragic.

"I was a wreck. I nearly died," she said.

"I was really lucky that I didn't have a baby or any children in the car."

[REDACTED] became trapped inside a Porsche - with his child - in a similar incident in 2010.

Technicians determined that electronic interference had blocked signals from the Porsche's wireless smart key and that had caused the doors and windows to lock.

Porsche spokesman Paul Ellis said at the time that "external interference is not something that can be completely eliminated and you do get black holes where interference is possible".

The Porsche Panamera uses a smart key similar to [REDACTED] Audi.

An Ambulance NSW spokesman said it was rare for paramedics to treat adults stuck in cars.

But he said children trapped in hot cars could suffer "damage to body cells leading to unconsciousness, shock, organ failure and death".

Adults were less likely to be so harmed.

[REDACTED]  
Location

Perth

Date and time

January 09, 2014, 10:08AM

another first world problem, kinda related, is that our VW golf makes it impossible to open the doors once locked from the inside. it also turns off the horn while the car is off. both of which i think are incredibly dangerous. i realise it's probably to stop kids from sitting and honking the horn, or getting out of the car while their parents aren't there, but seriously, it's crazy that you can't get out.

i once got out of the car and automatically pressed the lock button, accidentally locked my wife in there for a few minutes.

she was knocking on the window, but due to lots of poeple being around and making quite a bit of noise, nobody could hear her, and with the tinted windows at night, nobody could see her very well either. she tried honking the horn, which of course didn't work. i ended up wandering back to the car wondering why she hadn't got out. i've been hassled about this for a couple years until she did the same thing to me recently.

it is also crazy that the horn doesn't work when the car is off. imagine, for example, a truck backing into your car while you're sitting in it, parked.

I'd say these are serious, dangerous design flaws which i hope VW/Audi has amended by now. ours is a 2006 model golf

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Bandera, TX



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Washington DC 20590