

## **Are Apple's New AirTags More Problematic Than They Are Helpful?**

The AirTag was released as Apple's newest product in April 2021. The purpose of the device is to act as a key finder that helps people find personal objects—such as car keys, wallets, and luggage. The AirTag technology works by sending out a Bluetooth signal, which shows the location of the AirTag, that can be detected by nearby devices through the “Find My” app.<sup>1</sup> Users can track their AirTags to within 0.1 feet. Additionally, if the item is located nearby, an AirTag user can use the device's “Precision Finding” feature to see which direction to head in to more easily locate the AirTag. While Apple intended to create a simple and effective way to find items that a user has left behind, the dark reality is that, since it was released, the device has been improperly used in the commission of crimes, such as stalking.

Recently, a growing number of people have taken to social media outlets (such as TikTok and Twitter) to share the details of how they found an unwanted AirTag on their cars or in their belongings.<sup>2</sup> A December 2021 report from *The New York Times* contains reports from at least seven women who believe they were tracked with AirTags.<sup>3</sup> Tracking devices similar to Apple's AirTag, such as the Tile, are also available on the market.<sup>4</sup> And while comparable concerns exist with these devices, the largest concern that distinguishes the AirTag is its unique ability to track the device's location within 0.1 feet.

To address this, the AirTag has a feature built in to discourage unwanted tracking. If someone else's AirTag is placed in your belongings (or on your car), your iPhone will notice it is traveling with you and send you an alert. If you have not found the device after a designated time

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apple.com/airtag/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/30/technology/apple-airtags-tracking-stalking.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://appleinsider.com/articles/21/12/31/the-airtag-stalking-problem-is-only-partially-apples-problem-its-mostly-law-enforcements>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/05/05/apple-airtags-stalking/>

period (usually between 8 to 24 hours), the AirTag will start playing a sound to let you know it is there.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, Apple has created a “Tracker Detect” app to allow Android users to detect unwanted AirTags. While these safety features help resolve unwanted tracking to some extent, they do not adequately protect victims. For example, many victims have not found the device until *after* they have arrived home. At this point, the stalker has learned personal and dangerous information. Additionally, it is very easy for individuals to activate AirTags and then later disable them. In that case, the stalker uses the device to track their targeted victim to a specific destination and then disables the device so it cannot be easily detected.<sup>6</sup>

All in all, while the AirTag is a great tool to ensure you can keep track of all your personal items, the risks it poses may outweigh the potential benefits. Moving forward, Apple should continue to add safeguards to the device to ensure AirTags are not being used in dangerous and exploitative ways. In the meantime, if you find yourself in a situation where you hear an unusual beeping sound coming from your purse or car, you may want to check around for an unwanted AirTag.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/jan/20/apple-airtags-stalking-complaints-technology>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-60004257>

**Short Description:** This blog post addresses the Apple AirTag and growing concerns that the devices may be used for a new form of stalking. This post suggests that while Apple already has some safety mechanisms in place, it needs to do more to ensure individuals do not become victims of stalking.

**Personal Summary:** Kristen Smith is a 2L from Louisville, Kentucky. After graduation, she hopes to complete a federal clerkship and then begin her legal career in Chicago, Illinois.