

Beware of highway robbers on Wi-Fi

October 12 2009, By William Hageman

As the number of Wi-Fi hot spots grows, travelers might want to heed a word of caution from the Wi-Fi Alliance, a nonprofit industry group that promotes Wi-Fi technology: Think security.

"There's always a trade-off between ease of connecting and [Wi-Fi](#) security," said Kelly Davis-Felner, spokeswoman for the group, "so when folks are using ... a hot spot, they typically should assume that security is not enabled. We advise people that they should use caution when doing things like banking or online shopping in a public Wi-Fi hot spot."

Say you open your [laptop](#) in an airport, your hotel or any of the hundreds of thousands of public places that now have Wi-Fi available. When the list of available networks pops up, find one on which security is enabled.

"We advise people to look for something that has either WPA or WPA2 (Wi-Fi Protected Access) next to it," Davis-Felner said. "Those are the two types of Wi-Fi security that people should look for."

She added that to be safe, people should not transmit sensitive data, such as by shopping or making banking transactions, from public hot spots, lest someone nearby steal potentially damaging information, such as credit card numbers.

The Alliance (wi-fi.org/secure_your_wi-fi) emphasizes that surfing the Web and sending e-mail is fine.

"What we always tell people is, you take bigger risks every day when you do things like hand your credit card to a waiter and he walks away with it to go process it," Davis-Felner said. "(But) people should not transmit sensitive data over what they think is an unprotected Wi-Fi network.

"... There are much greater risks in life than having your [e-mail](#) hacked while you're in a public hot spot. You might want to pay attention to where your purse is when surfing the Web on your Wi-Fi network."

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