

The FBI is warning travelers they should not use charging stations in airports and other public places because “bad actors” can install malware on their phone.

Is this a legitimate threat? I’ll answer that question and suggest what you should do instead.

TRT 135
STD OUTCUE

SUPER

14-22 Jamey Tucker/whatthetech.tv

ON—CAMERA TEASE

THE F.B.I. SENDS OUT A WARNING TO TRAVELERS: DO NOT USE PUBLIC CHARGING STATIONS YOU FIND IN AIRPORTS. I’M JAMEY TUCKER. COMING UP I’LL EXPLAIN WHY AND WHAT YOU SHOULD DO INSTEAD.

ANCHOR INTRO

A CONSUMER WARNING FROM THE F.B.I. ABOUT CHARGING SMARTPHONES IN PUBLIC USING CHARGING STATIONS YOU OFTEN SEE IN AIRPORTS AND OTHER PUBLIC PLACES.

AGENTS WARN BAD ACTORS HAVE FIGURED OUT HOW TO INSTALL MALWARE ON PHONES PLUGGED INTO THOSE CHARGING STATIONS. OUR CONSUMER TECHNOLOGY REPORTER JAMEY TUCKER EXPLAINS.

PACKAGE SCRIPT

A long day in airports and your phone will need charging. Airports have these convenient chargers under seats and maybe a wall of them. The FBI says they’re unsafe and you should never use them.

The concern is that “bad actors” have figured out a way to install software on those charging stations that can exchange information to and from the phone. It’s called “Juice Jacking”, meaning, bad guys can download your data and install malware on the phone that can steal information even after you unplug it.

Fortunately, Apple has safety features to protect an iPhone or iPad from ‘juice jacking’.

If you plug your phone into a charger and see a prompt that says “Trust this computer” that’s a warning it isn’t just a charger. If you see that when using a public charger, unplug the phone.

If you just have to use those charging stations or a public computer in a hotel or library, you can pick up one of these data-blocking adapters that prevents your phone from sharing or receiving data.

Another option is to use your own charging block and plug it into an electrical outlet. It'll charge faster too.

Or, and maybe better, pick up a portable charger. You can find them for under \$20 now and take them wherever you might need it.

Anker and other brands make these portable chargers that connect to phones wirelessly so you don't have to keep up with a cable.

The FBI issued a similar warning a couple of years ago. And didn't say if there was any evidence of compromised charging stations, only that it is possible. That's What the Tech? I'm Jamey Tucker.

ANCHOR TAG

IN THE SAME WARNING THE F.B.I. URGES TRAVELERS TO BE CAREFUL OF PUBLIC WI-FI NETWORKS AND TO REFRAIN FROM DOING BANKING OR OTHER IMPORTANT WORK WHILE ON A WI-FI NETWORK.

WEB STORY

The FBI has issued a [warning](#) to travelers that public phone charging stations may not be safe to use. The Bureau warns that bad actors have figured out a way to use those charging stations to steal information from connected phones as well as how to install malware onto the phones.

While the FBI did not give specifics or say there have been reported incidents, it does say it's possible. There's even a name for this action: "Juice Jacking".

It's certainly possible but fortunately, Apple has safety measures in place to warn iPhone and iPad users that the information on the device is at risk.

If you plug a phone or tablet into a charger using a USB cable you may see a warning or prompt on the screen asking if you "Trust this computer". If you see that warning, you aren't plugging the phone into a charger but a computer or device that can access and transfer data.

If you're using a free charging station in an airport, train station, hotel, or library and see that warning you should tap "Do Not Trust" and quickly unplug the phone.

Android phones I've tried do not have that safety measure.

If you're traveling your phone or device is likely going to need charging so what are your options other than a free charging station?

Carry along your own charging block and plug it into an electrical outlet. This ensures your phone is only connected to power.

Another, and possibly better option is to pick up a portable battery charger. These are now under \$20 and widely available and will charge or re-charge a phone multiple times before it needs recharging itself.