



ABS - AMERICAN BUILDING SUPPLY, INC.

Tech Tips



The Truth About Lock Bumping

The technology behind a standard pin tumbler lock has not changed in well over 40 years. It is interesting that it took so long to discover an inherent flaw in this design that renders the lock far less secure than once thought. In 1970 a locksmith in Denmark discovered he could remove the plug from a locked cylinder by applying slight pressure to the back of the plug and rapping the cylinder against a firm flat surface. Sometime later it was realized that a *bump key* could be used to unlock a pin tumbler lock even on a locked door. The concept of using a bump key seemed to explode world wide about five years ago. Fifteen years ago I learned this technique; but it was not called bumping back then.

A *bump key* is made by filing or cutting a key to all 9s. The technique involves putting the bump key in a lock, applying a slight turning force and tapping the key down with a mallet or similar device. The idea is that the bump will bounce the pins up and the pressure of turning the key will trap the top pins in the cylinder and allow the lower pins to drop back into the plug.

The countermeasures available are bump proof locks and unusual key profiles. Bump proof locks can be broken down to two basic types. True bump proof locks do not employ pin tumblers. These include electronic locks without key override, magnetic locks, and locks using rotating disks. The remainder includes pin tumbler locks that manufacturers claim are bump proof. There is a great deal of controversy as to just how secure these bump proof pin tumbler locks are. Finally, since a bump key must have the same profile as the lock it is to open, unique, restricted, or registered key profiles are much harder to bump since the keys are harder to obtain.

Registered or restricted keyway cylinders are expensive and general only fit in commercial locks and deadbolts. Most residential locks are smaller in design and would look awkward with a commercial lock or deadbolt with its larger profile. The Schlage "A" series locks will accept these cylinders and does have a smaller profile. Fortunately, commercial applications are more easily resolved. The Schlage Everest C123 keyway will fit the "A" series and all commercial lock. It has a unique profile with a single side finger pin and there is no up charge for this keyway. Since locksmiths do not typically stock this unique key profile, it might be a good idea to order extra key blanks from us.