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BusKill, a \$20 USB Dead Man's Switch for Linux Laptop

January 4, 2020 By [Pierluigi Paganini](#)

'BusKill' is a cheap [kill cord](#) Dead Man Switch to trigger the machine to self-destruct in case the laptop is stolen, it was

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designed by the software engineer [Michael Altfield](#).

The idea is very simple, the BusKill cable connects a Linux laptop to the user, for example, to his belt. In case of theft, the USB cable disconnects from the laptop and triggers a udev script that executes a sequence of operations, from shutting down to completely wipe the device or delete certain sensitive data on the disk.

"Surprisingly, I couldn't find a low-tech solution that implements a laptop kill cord, so I decided to build one myself for ~\$20 and a simple udev rule." [wrote](#) the expert in a blog post.

"We do what we can to increase our OpSec when using our laptop in public-such as using a good VPN provider, 2FA, and password database auto-fill to prevent network or shoulder-based eavesdropping," says Altfield. "But even then, there's always a risk that someone could just steal your laptop after you've authenticated!"

The expert published a [video](#) showing BusKill triggering a kill signal when the magnetic breakaway is tripped.

Altfield published the instructions to build the BusKill cables just buying a few components for a price ranging from \$20 up to \$45:

1. A cheap [\\$4 USB drive](#) with durable keyring hole
2. A small & strong carabiner keyring for attaching the above drive to your belt loop (I like [this \\$6 one](#) because it's small, well-made, and has a clever locking mechanism)
3. A [\\$7 USB magnetic breakaway adapter](#) to plug into the computer's USB-A port
4. And finally, a [\\$3 1-meter USB extension cable](#) to connect them

The expert published two sample udev scripts that lock the device by activating the screensaver and shuts down the laptop respectively.

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Pierluigi Paganini

Pierluigi Paganini is member of the ENISA (European Union Agency for Network and Information Security) Threat Landscape Stakeholder Group and Cyber G7 Group, he is also a Security Evangelist, Security Analyst and Freelance Writer. Editor-in-Chief at "Cyber Defense Magazine", Pierluigi is a cyber security expert with over 20 years experience in the field, he is Certified Ethical Hacker at EC Council in London. The passion for writing and a strong belief that security is founded on sharing and awareness led Pierluigi to find the security blog "Security Affairs" recently named a Top National Security Resource for US. Pierluigi is a member of the "The Hacker News" team and he is a writer for some major publications in the field such as Cyber War Zone, ICTTF, Infosec Island, Infosec Institute, The Hacker News Magazine and for many other Security magazines. Author of the Books "The Deep Dark Web" and "Digital Virtual Currency and Bitcoin".



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