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Schoolboy hacks into city's tram system

By Graeme Baker

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A teenage boy who hacked into a Polish tram system used it like "a giant train set", causing chaos and derailing four vehicles.

The 14-year-old, described by his teachers as a model pupil and an electronics "genius", adapted a television remote control so it could change track points in the city of Lodz.

Twelve people were injured in one derailment, and the boy is suspected of having been involved in several similar incidents.

The teenager, who was not named by police, told them he had changed the points for a prank.

A police statement said he had trespassed at tram depots in the city to gather information and the equipment needed to build the infra-red device.

"Questioned by police in the presence of a psychologist, the teenager testified he switched tram tracks three times, once causing a tram to jump the tracks," said the statement. A search at the boy's home turned up the device he had used to switch tram tracks.

advertisement Miroslaw Micor, a spokesman for Lodz police, said: "He studied the trams and the tracks for a long time and then built a device that looked like a TV remote control and used it to manoeuvre the trams and the tracks.



The boy, described as a 'genius' and some of the equipment he used

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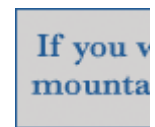
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"He had converted the television control into a device capable of controlling all the junctions on the line and wrote in the pages of a school exercise book where the best junctions were to move trams around and what signals to change.

"He treated it like any other schoolboy might a giant train set, but it was lucky nobody was killed. Four trams were derailed, and others had to make emergency stops that left passengers hurt. He clearly did not think about the consequences of his actions."

The first sign of the chaos came on Tuesday afternoon, when a city tram driver tried to steer his vehicle to the right, but found himself helpless to stop it swerving to the left

instead.

The rear wagon then swung off the rails and crashed into another passing tram, hurling screaming passengers to the floor.

Transport employees were reported as saying that they knew immediately that someone outside their staff had caused the accident.

The boy will face a special juvenile court on charges of endangering public safety, police said.

The incident is the latest in which "hackers" - many of them young computer experts - have broken into computer systems.

A 20-year-old was questioned in New Zealand last year suspected of writing programs for an internet "spyware" scam targeting several hundred thousand bank accounts.

In 1999, a group of hackers used home computers to break into the systems controlling Skynet, a British military satellite, and changed secure settings.

A report by the US Federal Aviation Administration this week raised concerns that a passenger aboard the new Boeing 787 "Dreamliner" aircraft might be able to hack into the aircraft's systems via its internet connection.

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