

Stolen laptop 'difficult to access'

AOIFE CARR and CONOR LALLY

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Managing director of Bord Gáis Energy Dave Bunworth said this morning the stolen laptop containing the account details of 75,000 customers would be “very difficult to get into” despite it not being encrypted.

“I don’t want to minimise the risk but this is not a normal laptop that you could break into that easily,” he told RTÉ radio.

He said a systems failure had led to the laptop not being encrypted but said every machine in the company was now encrypted.

The affected customers have been warned to monitor their bank accounts for suspicious transactions. The office of the Data Protection Commissioner warned that fraudsters could potentially use their information to withdraw money from their accounts or take out loans in their name.

“The risk may be low but there is a risk,” said deputy Data Protection commissioner Gary Davis.

Four laptops were stolen from Bord Gáis offices on Foley Street in Dublin’s north inner city in the early hours of Friday, June 5th. One of the computers, containing the banking details of about 75,000 people, was not encrypted.

The laptop contains details such as account numbers, home addresses and branch details of people who had recently switched from the ESB as part of Bord Gáis’s “Big Switch” campaign.

Bord Gáis plans to write to all of the customers tomorrow. It has also begun contacting the main banks to inform them how many of their customers’ details are on the non-encrypted stolen machine.

Mr Bunworth told *The Irish Times* last night he “deeply regretted” the theft of a machine that was not encrypted.

“We have had an aggressive system of encrypting since last July and this computer should have been encrypted before it was given to the staff member; it was a flaw in the system.”

Mr Bunworth said that while the machine was not encrypted, the data saved on it could only be accessed using a username and password.

The Irish Times understands gardaí believe they know who broke into the Bord Gáis offices and nearby premises last Friday week. However, the stolen goods have not yet been found.

Mr Davis said the office of the Data Protection Commissioner was informed by Bord Gáis immediately the robbery took place.

Bord Gáis confirmed with the commissioner’s office last Thursday that one of the laptops was not encrypted.

Gardaí informed the company they were working on a definite line of inquiry and it was decided that no public comment would be made. When the Garda investigation yielded nothing, Bord Gáis decided to make a statement.

Meanwhile, a HSE inquiry into the theft of 15 laptops, two of them non-encrypted, from its Roscommon town offices last weekend is complete. The inquiry found one laptop contained case notes of families dealing with social workers.

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