

Get out of My Face!

By Bill Hobby

It's finally happened. They are warning us against the expensive safety devices with which they have cluttered up our lives. The new cars have warnings on the sun visors that the air bags that the feds require to protect us can hurt us or kill us by literally getting in our faces.

Get out of my face!

"Anti-theft devices" don't give car thieves much of a problem, but they sure make trouble for car owners and money for mechanics. I have had to get road service three times in the past two years because these devices wouldn't let me start my own car. That's at about \$60 a pop because expensive stuff that I didn't want in the first place didn't work.

That \$180 is, of course, in addition to what, I paid extra when I first got the car to disconnect the alarm system that sets off the horn whenever somebody touches the car—like somebody trying to get into their own car in the next parking place. The blaring, warbling horn is a public nuisance.

Get out of my face!

General Motors has decided he knows best when to lock the car. The automatic locking systems could easily lock a child in a car when the driver has accidentally left the keys in the car. The "child security lock" unaccountably locks the rear doors from time to time. Both systems are irritating and potentially dangerous. Thank you, General, but I've been driving for about fifty years. Please let me decide when to lock the car--and when not to--all by myself, thank you.

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General Motors has decided he knows best when to turn on the headlights. Thank you, General, but I've been driving for about fifty years. Please let me decide when to turn on the headlights--and when not to--all by myself, thank you.

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When they have finished protecting us in our cars, they start protecting us in airports. When we get to the airport, a recorded voice tells us repeatedly that we don't have to give money to the nuts who beg in airports. We know we don't have to shell out money to street beggars (though we can if we want to). Don't they think we have enough sense to know we don't have to shell out to the airport beggars?

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Then they run us and our purses, briefcases, or whatever, through an x-ray machine. The x-ray machine is very good at detecting car keys, calculators, and laptop computers.

Beginning recently they hand-search as many of our bags as they can, whether or not the x-ray showed anything suspicious.

Do you feel safer now?

After we and our carry-ons have been x-rayed, we are asked if the baggage that has just been x-rayed has been out of our control or given to us by somebody else. What does that matter if the baggage has just passed the electronic sniff test?

Then we are asked for our photo ID cards. That certainly helps. Does your driver's license photo look like you? If not, should you be told you can't get on the airplane? And isn't that requirement putting a pretty heavy load on the airline gate agent, who, after all, is not a policeman.

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When we get on the airplane, the feds nag us some more. The incessant prattling about seatbelts being securely fastened is fedspeak. What would happen if we insecurely fastened our seatbelts? How could we do that? My favorite is the warning from Uncle Sam that "packages may have shifted in flight". In fairness, the airlines contribute their share of the pointless babble: "Let us be the first to welcome you to Dallas....". "On behalf of the Houston ground crew..." "Get out of my face!"

Last year President Clinton decided to protect children from being shot by enclosing with every gun purchased a card urging the new gun owner not to shoot children.

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(How many more of these are there out there? Please send examples to Get out of my face! c/o Bill Hobby, PO Box 326, Houston, TX 77001-0326 or hobby@rice.edu)

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