

Man ordered to pay \$500K for Blue Ash company hack

[Kevin Grasha](#), kgrasha@enquirer.com 2:01 p.m. ET March 9, 2017

A former employee of a Blue Ash company that makes breathalyzer locks for vehicle ignitions was sentenced to 15 months in prison for hacking company information and threatening to release it publicly.

Carlos Ruiz-Rodriguez, 25, also was ordered to pay more than half a million dollars to the company and its insurer to cover the cost of responding to the breach. The company hired three computer forensic investigation companies, court documents say.

Prosecutors said Ruiz-Rodriguez was a work-from-home call center employee for the company, which is not named in court documents. However, Blue Ash-based LifeSafer, Inc. was named in previous reports about the case. He had access to a shared company drive, court documents say.

In 2015, according to court documents, Ruiz-Rodriguez accessed the confidential information using a supervisor's password that he was able to guess. The information he obtained, the documents say, included breathalyzer schematics and client data.

Between November 2015 and January 2016, prosecutors say Ruiz-Rodriguez – a high school graduate who had taken classes at Cincinnati State – sent anonymous extortion emails to company executives.

He demanded a ransom paid through Bitcoin, an encrypted digital currency. If the company didn't pay, according to court documents, Ruiz-Rodriguez said "the company schematics and client data would be released to the public."

He was able to obscure his identity as well as information that would identify the computer that sent the emails.

Company officials could not immediately be reached for comment Thursday.

Ruiz-Rodriguez, prosecutors said, "took great delight in tormenting the individuals running the company with his threats."

The information eventually was posted on an internet "dark web" forum, "Hell Reloaded," in January 2016. Soon after, the company made two separate ransom payments using Bitcoin that totaled \$15,000.

Court documents say Ruiz-Rodriguez didn't know how to post the information anonymously on the dark web, so he contacted an individual who "is a shadow figure."

Ruiz-Rodriguez left LifeSafer in December 2015. He was identified, prosecutors said, after telling a co-worker at his new job he had extorted his previous employer. One of the companies “got a tip” about that and contacted the FBI, court documents say.

In November, Ruiz-Rodriguez pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Cincinnati to an extortion charge.

The online publication Motherboard said the information posted included instruction manuals for modifying and assembling products, detailed schematics and apparent source code.

The breathalyzer devices prevent a vehicle from starting if the driver has been drinking. If the amount of alcohol exceeds a certain level, the vehicle’s ignition is locked.