

How to stop the beach thieves

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By Rebecca Marshall

HAVING your valuables stolen at the beach may be a thing of the past when a Queensland invention hits the shelves early next year. Forty-three-year-old Gladstone father of three Tony Dart has invented a beach safe that emits an ear-piercing, 90-decibel alarm if it is moved.

Sunshine Coast residents this week realised the extent of the problem when a man was jailed for a three-month beach crime spree from Noosa Heads to Caloundra. Maroochydore Magistrates Court heard that Christopher Malcolm Tawns, 56, had snatched almost \$43,000 worth of property left on the beaches by swimmers.

Mr Dart said major retailers across the country and the United States had expressed an interest in stocking his device, expected to sell for about \$90.

Christened the "Yelpie", the portable beach safe was the size of a shoe box and could fit two wallets, two mobile phones, a set of car keys, sunglasses, an iPod and a digital camera. "It's got a really good beach look and feel about it," Mr Dart said. "It has curved edges and a shoulder strap and it weighs just under a kilo."

He came up with the idea two years ago while on holiday on the Gold Coast. "We were going through the Gold Coast and we heard three cars had been broken into that morning after people had stolen car keys from the beach," he said. "So I checked and found there wasn't a product of its type anywhere on the market, so I put a patent out there."

The Yelpie requires its owner to enter a four-digit code to both arm and disarm the specially-designed and patented motion sensor inside. "A motion sensor will detect anyone trying to move it once it's armed," he said. "No one can pick it up and walk with it." Mr Dart said the software had been modified to make sure the alarm did not go off if it was accidentally bumped. "If someone kicks it once or twice by mistake the alarm will not sound," he said. "But if it is kicked a third time, it will go off. And you can hear it from about 150 metres away. "It's one of the most irritating alarms you can get. So if someone grabbed it, they couldn't stand to be near it."

Mr Dart said he had received great support from a Sydney-based product development company Tiller+Tiller. Director Robert Tiller said he considered hundreds of new ideas every week, but this one stood out. "It's easy to have ideas and come up with inventions but it's often very hard to commercialise them," he said. "But there is a great point of sale value here. "Everyone immediately understands the need and the reason for having such a device and it does a good job, it's like a dog without a tail."

The strap on the device can also be threaded through other bags to securely protect them if they are moved.

Look out for your Yelpie at Coles Myer, Big W, Bunnings, Rebel Sport and Sportscene from February.