California Bill Proposes Mandatory Cell Phone Kill Switches

Ben Munson

Democratic State Senator Mark Leno has proposed a bill that would require all smartphones and tablets sold in California to feature a kill switch [1], a theft deterrent that renders a device inoperable.

The bill would by Jan. 1, 2015 require manufacturers to include the function on all devices or face fines of up to $2,500 for each device sold without a kill switch, according to the New York Times [2].

As the report points out, if the bill passes it would likely result in OEMs embedding kill switches in all devices.

San Francisco District Attorney George Gascón is a sponsor of the bill. When Samsung last year introduced a kill-switch technology called LoJack, Gascón emerged a strong proponent of the technology and its potential to curb smart device theft.

AT&T, Verizon, Sprint, T-Mobile and U.S. Cellular all rejected the idea of a smartphone kill switch [3].

CTIA, representing the U.S. mobile providers, spelled out the potential risks involved with such a measure, namely that a device cannot be restored once the kill switch is engaged and that the technology presents a target for malicious attacks from hackers.

CTIA outlined its alternative anti-device theft initiatives. With the cooperation of all major U.S. carriers, CTIA has assembled an integrated database of smartphones sold in the U.S. in order to prevent stolen devices from being reactivated. It said it hopes all domestic and foreign carriers will follow suit and integrate information into the database.

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