

US lawmakers target pre-paid cellphone anonymity

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A man uses a cell phone in New York. US lawmakers unveiled a bill Wednesday to enable law enforcement to identify users of pre-paid cell phones, charging that anonymity makes the devices attractive to terrorists, drug kingpins and gangs.

US lawmakers unveiled a bill Wednesday to enable law enforcement to identify users of pre-paid cell phones, charging that anonymity makes the devices attractive to terrorists, drug kingpins and gangs.

The legislation would require buyers of pre-paid cell phones to show identification when they purchase them and mandate that telephone companies keep the information on file as they do with subscription cell phones.

"This proposal is overdue because for years terrorists, drug kingpins and

gang members have stayed one step ahead of the law by using prepaid phones that are hard to trace," said Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer.

Schumer noted that the alleged Times Square bomb plotter, Faisal Shahzad, had used a pre-paid cell phone that can often be "a dead end for law enforcement."

"While most Americans use pre-paid mobile devices lawfully, the anonymous nature of these devices gives too much cover to individuals looking to use them for deviant, dangerous means," said Republican Senator John Cornyn.

Pre-paid cell phones can typically be bought with cash and activated without signing a contract or facing a credit check.

The senators said Shahzad used a pre-paid cell phone to arrange the purchase of the vehicle he allegedly hoped to use as a car bomb, and that US authorities tracked him down only because a number listed in the phone's call log matched one Shahzad provided to authorities upon entering the United States months earlier.

"But for that stroke of luck, authorities might never have been able to match the phone number provided by the seller of the Pathfinder to Shahzad," they said in a joint statement.

Countries including Australia, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Norway, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland and Thailand already require registration of pre-paid [cell phone users](#), the senators said.

And at least six US states have been mulling similar rules, they said.

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