

US prosecutors want smartphone 'kill switch'

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Craig Federighi, senior vice president of Software Engineering at Apple demonstrates the new activation lock security feature in iOS 7 during the keynote address of the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference Monday, June 10, 2013 in San Francisco. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

U.S. law enforcement officials are demanding the creation of a "kill switch" that would render smartphones inoperable after they are stolen, New York's top prosecutor said in a clear warning to the world's smartphone manufacturers.

Citing statistics showing that 1 in 3 robberies nationwide involve the theft of a mobile phone, [New York Attorney General](#) Eric Schneiderman on Thursday announced the formation of a coalition of [law enforcement agencies](#) devoted to stamping out what he called an "epidemic" of robberies.

"All too often, these robberies turn violent," said Schneiderman, who was joined at a news conference by San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon. "There are assaults. There are murders."

The coalition, which is called the Secure Our Smartphones Initiative, will pressure smartphone companies and their shareholders to help dry up the secondary market in stolen phones.

The announcement came on the same day Gascon and Schneiderman were scheduled to co-host a "Smartphone Summit" with representatives from major smartphone makers Apple Inc., [Samsung Electronics Co.](#), [Google Inc.](#) and Microsoft Corp.

Schneiderman would not elaborate on how far his office might go to ensure that manufacturers comply with the coalition's demands.

He likened the functionality of a "[kill switch](#)" to the ability for consumers to cancel a stolen credit card.

The general public should not be forced to pay more for smartphones that have a "kill switch," Schneiderman said.

After the summit, Schneiderman and Gascon released a statement saying they "asked the companies to commit to develop effective solutions to this national [crime wave](#) and install them on all new products within one year."

Apple said at a developers' conference this week that such a feature would be part of its iOS7 software to be released in the fall. Gascon and Schneiderman said in a statement they were appreciative of the gesture but would reserve judgment until they could "understand its actual functionality."

"Apple has been very vague as to what the system will do," Gascon said at the news conference.

In New York City, nicknamed the Big Apple, police have coined the term "Apple-picking" to describe thefts of the popular iPhone and other mobile products, like iPads. Such thefts comprise 40 percent of all robberies in New York City, authorities say.

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