

Smartphone makers add features to stymie thieves

November 8 2013, by Dana Hull

The theft of iPhones and iPads is so widespread it's known as "Apple picking." But Apple devices aren't the only targets. Nearly one in three robberies nationwide involves the theft of a mobile phone, according to the Federal Communications Commission. The problem is so severe in their cities that San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon and New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman this summer convened a "smartphone summit" to urge the smartphone industry to implement technological solutions to thwart the robberies.

Now some makers of wireless mobile devices, notably Apple Inc. and Samsung Electronics Co., are taking steps to fight back against the thieves.

Apple's new iOS 7 mobile operating system, includes a security feature called Activation Lock that automatically works with the free Find My iPhone feature. Find My iPhone is built into iOS 7 and can be enabled in Settings.

Activation Lock basically ties your devices to your Apple ID. Criminals who steal phones typically "wipe" the devices clean so they can resell them. Now any thief who wants to turn off Find My iPhone, erase the device, or reset the device will be required to enter the Apple ID and password.

Supporters of such security measures say they will discourage thieves from stealing phones because they will not be able to sell them.

Alex Castro, who lives in Oakland, Calif., started spreading the word about Activation Lock as a community service as soon as it came out in October.

"A friend's cousin was killed for her iPhone in St. Louis," said Castro, 39. "My goal is to educate others. I had no idea that there was such a black market for smartphones."

Castro notes that Activation Lock won't stop someone from robbing you for your phone. But it will discourage thefts, he says, by making stolen phones "nearly worthless."

"This has the potential to decimate the market for stolen iPhones, and if there is no demand, then there will be no reason for criminals to mug people for their iPhone," he wrote in Oakland Local, a popular community blog.

Oakland resident Dan Jewett lost an Apple laptop when his home was burglarized. He's glad that Apple enhanced the security of the iPhone and would like to see other smartphone makers follow suit.

"We all carry so much personal info on our phone these days, and you don't want that in a criminal's hands," said Jewett. "It is time for corporate citizens to step up and make these phones into paperweights for those who steal them."

Activation Lock also has won praise from law enforcement officials.

"We are pleased that Apple released a mobile operating system that includes a theft deterrent feature called Activation Lock," Gascon said in a statement. "This is an important first step toward ending the global epidemic of smartphone theft."

Gascon's office is urging iPhone users in San Francisco to download iOS 7, and hopes that other manufacturers will follow Apple's lead.

"IPhones are not the only devices targeted, which is why we continue to pressure the other leading manufacturers of smartphones to quickly implement effective theft deterrents that protect their customers from violent crime," he said.

Samsung partners with Absolute Software, which sells device tracking and recovery software and services for PCs, laptops and mobile devices. Samsung's Galaxy S4 smartphone includes Absolute software that allows owners to remotely delete files and lock down the stolen device, rendering it useless to thieves.

If you lose your iPhone or if it is stolen, Apple advises trying to locate the device using Find My iPhone. You can also put the device in "Lost Mode," and keep track of its location and indicate to anyone who comes across it that the device has been lost or stolen. And if you want to delete all of your personal information from your missing device, you can erase it remotely.

Apple says that because Activation Lock requires an Apple ID and password to turn off Find My iPhone, the chances of getting a lost or stolen phone back are improved because the layer of security may cause "finders keepers" to think twice.

"This can help you keep your device secure, even if it is in the wrong hands, and can improve your chances of recovering it," Apple says on its website. "Even if you erase your device remotely, Activation Lock can continue to deter anyone from reactivating your device without your permission."

And what if you forget your password? You can reset it at My Apple ID

(appleid.[apple.com](https://appleid.apple.com)) or by contacting Apple Support and going through the steps to verify your identity.

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