

# Wireless industry makes anti-theft commitment

April 16 2014, by Terry Collins

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The iPhone 5.

A trade group for wireless providers said Tuesday that the biggest mobile device manufacturers and carriers will soon put anti-theft tools on the gadgets to try to deter rampant smartphone theft.

CTIA-The Wireless Association announced that under a "Smartphone Anti-Theft Voluntary Commitment," the companies including Apple Inc., Samsung Electronics Co., Verizon Wireless, AT&T Inc., U.S. Cellular Corp., Sprint Corp. and T-Mobile US Inc. have agreed to provide a free preloaded or downloadable anti-theft tool on smartphones sold in the U.S. after July 2015.

Owners' options will include remotely removing a smartphone's data and preventing reactivation if a phone is stolen or lost, the association said.

It appears the [wireless](#) industry has somewhat reversed course as law enforcement and elected officials in the U.S. demand that manufacturers implement a "kill switch" to combat surging smartphone theft across the country. Industry officials have previously said putting a permanent kill switch on phones has serious risks, including the potential that hackers could activate it.

"We appreciate the commitment made by these companies to protect wireless users in the event their smartphones are lost or stolen," CTIA CEO Steve Largent said in a written statement. "This flexibility provides consumers with access to the best features and apps that fit their unique needs while protecting their smartphones and the valuable information they contain. At the same time, it's important different technologies are available so that a 'trap door' isn't created that could be exploited by hackers and criminals."

The wireless industry's announcement comes nearly two weeks after Samsung announced that it had added two anti-theft features, "Find My Mobile" and "Reactivation Lock" to its recently released Galaxy S5 smartphone.

Apple created a similar "Activation Lock" feature for the popular iPhone last year and has offered a free tool called "Find My iPhone."

Almost one in three robberies in the U.S. involve phone theft, according to the Federal Communications Commission. Lost and stolen mobile devices—mostly smartphones—cost consumers more than \$30 billion in 2012, the agency said in a study.

Earlier this month, California legislators introduced a bill that, if passed, would require that mobile devices sold in or shipped to the state be equipped with the anti-theft devices starting next year—a move that could be the first of its kind in the United States. Similar legislation is being considered in New York, Illinois and Minnesota, and bills have been introduced in both houses of Congress.

San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon and New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, who have given the manufacturers a June deadline to find solutions to curb smartphone theft, said in a joint statement Tuesday that while CTIA's plan is "a welcomed step," it still falls short of effectively ending smartphone theft because the measures will rely on consumers to seek out and turn on the technology.

Gascon added, "This approach is a losing strategy, and that's why this commitment falls short of what American wireless consumers need to effectively end the epidemic of smartphone theft."

But Jeff Kagan, a longtime tech analyst in Atlanta, said Tuesday that the wireless industry's commitment may be the closest to solving the [smartphone](#) theft problem. He believes the industry's [commitment](#) occurred because they saw that government is in the process of making sweeping changes.

"I'm sure there will be a lot of back and forth, but this is the next natural step," Kagan said. "I don't think the wireless industry would've done this if there wasn't pressure from lawmakers and the public to come up with some solutions. Sometimes it takes a nudge."

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