

Samsung's quick fix for Galaxy Note 7 is no full recharge

September 13 2016, by Youkyung Lee



Samsung plans to issue a software update for its recalled Galaxy Note 7 smartphones that will prevent them from overheating by limiting battery recharges to 60 percent.

The front page of the Seoul Shinmun, a South Korean newspaper, carried a Samsung advertisement on Tuesday announcing the software update for any users of the Note 7 who may be disregarding its recall notice and continuing to use the smartphone.

"It is a measure to put consumer safety first but we apologize for causing inconvenience," the advertisement by Samsung Electronics said. The update for South Korean users will start Sept. 20, it said.

South Korean media earlier reported the software update plan, citing Samsung.

It was not clear when the update may be issued overseas. Also unclear was whether it will be forced on existing Note 7 phones regardless of user consent. Yonhap News Agency reported that Samsung is in talks with mobile carriers to deliver the same update to keep battery power at 60 percent or below at all times.

Samsung plans to begin issuing new Note 7s with batteries it says will not be prone to overheating starting Sept. 19 in South Korea. It recalled 2.5 million of the devices just two weeks after their launch after dozens of cases in which batteries exploded or caught fire. Samsung says the problem stems from a manufacturing glitch in the batteries.

Samsung is the world's largest smartphone maker, and analysts said the recall may leave a larger impact on its brand than earlier estimated. Aviation regulators and airlines have deemed the Note 7 a flight hazard and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is considering an official product recall.

The company has urged consumers to immediately turn off the phones and get them replaced with the new Note 7.

But implementing such a large-scale recall is a challenge. Consumers have to visit Samsung service centers or retailers twice—once to get a replacement phone—not a Galaxy Note 7—and have a safety check of their existing Note 7, and a second time to get a new Note 7. South Koreans are traveling for one of the two biggest national holidays of the year starting Wednesday, which complicates the recall plan.

Samsung offered free pizza to apologize to workers at mobile carrier shops who have been handling the unprecedented recall. Some will work during the holidays this week as Samsung plans to keep its service centers open.

Lee In-tae, an employee at a SK Telecom shop in central Seoul, said two pizzas were delivered to the shop during lunchtime on Tuesday with a letter from Samsung that included an apology for causing inconvenience with the recall. South Korean media said Samsung gave free pizzas to all employees at local handset shops and mobile carriers.

"We ate the pizza among a few of us," Lee said by phone. He and his co-workers have been handling complaints from Note 7 consumers. "We have to do all the recalls here, do all the work and listen to all the bad things. But it feels like (Samsung) is trying to make up for it with that," he said, referring to the pizza.

Samsung did not answer emails and calls seeking comment on Tuesday.

Analysts said the software update appears to be a last-ditch effort to contain the crisis.

Samsung "has to contain the battery explosions but people are not returning the phones," said Peter Yu, an analyst at BNP Paribas. "It is taking a desperate measure."

Keeping the battery level low could reduce the risk of overheating, but would be equivalent to getting a downgrade of a top-of-the-line phone, said Kim Young Woo, an analyst at SK Securities. The Galaxy Note series are among the most expensive handsets made by Samsung.

"It means that the phone has not been optimized before the release," Kim said.

Canada issued a recall notice on Monday.

The company did not say how many more battery fires in the Note 7 have been reported since Sept. 1, when 35 cases were confirmed. In announcing its recall, the Canadian government said one case was confirmed in Canada while Samsung received more than 70 reported cases in the United States alone.

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