

U.S. Officials To Meet Over Cellphone Thefts

Terry Collins, Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Top law enforcement officials from San Francisco and New York plan to meet with some of the largest U.S. smartphone makers next week to help thwart the rise in cellphone thefts and robberies.

San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon and New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman announced Wednesday that their meeting scheduled to take place in New York City on June 13 will be dubbed a "Smartphone Summit."

Gascon and Schneiderman said they plan to meet with representatives from Apple Inc., Google Inc., Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd. and Microsoft Corp. and urge them to create new technology to permanently and quickly disable stolen smartphones, making them worthless to thieves.

In San Francisco, where more than half all robberies involve a cellphone, Gascon has called on the companies to create new technology such as a "kill switch" to render phones useless. His office cites a 27-year old tourist who suffered severe knife wounds to his face and throat two weeks ago after being robbed by two men over his iPhone.

In New York, Schneiderman said there was a 40 percent spike in cellphone thefts last year. Authorities there have coined the thefts of the popular iPhone and other Apple-related products as "Apple-picking."

"With 1.6 million Americans falling victim to smartphone theft in 2012, this has become a national epidemic," Gascón said in a statement. "Unlike other types of crimes, smartphone theft can be eradicated with a simple technological solution."

Nearly 175 million cellphones — mostly smartphones — have been sold in the U.S. in the past year and account for \$69 billion in sales, according to IDC, a Massachusetts-based research firm.

And now almost one 1 of 3 robberies nationwide involves the theft of a mobile phone, reports the Federal Communications Commission, which is coordinating formation this fall of a highly anticipated national database system to track cellphones reported stolen.

Schneiderman said a recent study found that lost and stolen cellphones cost consumers over \$30 billion, last year.

"The theft of handheld devices is the fastest-growing street crime, and increasingly, incidents are turning violent," Schneiderman said in a statement. "It's time for manufacturers to be as innovative in solving this problem as they have been in designing devices that have reshaped how we live."

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Late last month, Gascon — in a letter to the Major Cities Chiefs Association, a coalition of police chiefs from across the country — urged them to press for kill switches.

"Despite the growing threat to public safety, cell-phone manufacturers and carriers continue to look the other way," Gascón wrote. "It's time that corporations take social responsibility and do their part to end the victimization of hundreds of thousands of Americans."

In response, the police chiefs association followed suit and sent a letter on Monday to FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski. While commending the FCC and the CTIA wireless provider trade association on the national stolen phone database, they suggested that kill switch technology is "the only effective way" to go.

"By rendering phones completely useless, an FCC mandate for kill-switch technology will drastically reduce this major crime problem," Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey, president of the chiefs' association wrote.

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