

US prosecutors push for anti-phone theft moves

The Associated Press

The top prosecutors in San Francisco and New York planned Thursday to announce the formation of a nationwide initiative and coalition of police, prosecutors and other officials in an attempt to thwart a surge in smartphone thefts.

Officials said San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon and New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman were set to launch what they call the Secure Our Smartphones Initiative at a New York news conference on Thursday.

The coalition includes prosecutors, police and political officials and consumer advocates from more than a dozen states and intends to put pressure on smartphone companies and their shareholders to help dry up the secondary market in stolen phones.

The announcement comes on the same day Gascon and Schneiderman are scheduled to co-host a "Smartphone Summit" with representatives from major smartphone makers Apple Inc., Samsung Electronics Co., Google Inc. and Microsoft Corp.

Among the moves the prosecutors seek is the industry-wide introduction of a "kill switch" that would render stolen phones worthless.

Apple said at a conference of web developers this week that such a feature would be part of its iOS7 smartphone 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."

Almost 1 in 3 robberies nationwide involves the theft of a mobile phone, according to the Federal Communications Commission.

"The epidemic of violent street crime involving the theft and resale of mobile devices is a very real and growing threat in communities all across America," Schneiderman said in a statement. "According to reports, roughly 113 smartphones are stolen or lost each minute in the United States, with too many of those thefts turning violent."

In New York, police have coined the term "Apple-picking" to describe thefts of the popular iPhone and other mobile products like iPads.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/24/2014 - 8:08am):

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