Rise in phone thefts leads to Minnesota law requiring ‘kill switches’

By: Tim Anderson

Under a first-of-its-kind state law that takes effect next July, Minnesota will require all new smartphones sold within its borders to be equipped with an anti-theft “kill switch.” The passage of SF 1740 reflects growing concerns in Minnesota and other states about a rise in phone thefts.

At the University of Minnesota, for example, 62 percent of the robberies on campus now involve a smartphone. In half of those incidents, police told lawmakers during legislative testimony earlier this year, a firearm was used by the criminal. Nationwide, the Federal Communications Commission estimates that more than 30 percent of all robberies today involve smartphones. A “kill switch” allows owners of the phone to disable the device remotely.

According to The Washington Post, Minnesota is the first U.S. state to pass a “kill switch” bill; measures are also being considered in California and the U.S. Congress. In April, many of the nation’s leading wireless companies announced that they would voluntarily include kill-switch capabilities on smartphones manufactured after July 2015. Some lawmakers, though, would like these anti-theft features to be enabled on devices by default, rather than requiring consumers to opt in.

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