

Pretty Smart Phone

By Reg P. Wydeven
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While watching cable the other night, a great movie came on: 'G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra.' The film chronicles the origins of the anti-terrorist task force made popular by cartoons and action figures in the 1980s.

This iteration features nanomite technology developed by Cobra, a ruthless terrorist organization. The nanomites are microscopic robots that ingest metal. Storm Shadow, one of the flick's awesome bad guys, fires a rocket filled with the ravenous bugs at the Eiffel Tower. Before the entire monument, and all of Paris for that matter, were consumed, Duke, one of the movie's heroes, saves the day by hitting the rocket's kill switch, rendering the nanomites harmless.

If it weren't for the kill switch, there would have been no way of stopping Cobra's evil plot. For that same reason, lawmakers across the country are proposing that smartphones be equipped with kill switches.

New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and San Francisco District Attorney George Gascón established the nationwide Secure Our Smartphones (S.O.S) Initiative. The movement is aimed at encouraging the cell phone industry to adopt technologies that would deter theft by making stolen phones useless. Dozens of AGs, governors and law enforcement agencies, including the Milwaukee Police Department, have endorsed the movement.

Stealing smartphones is a huge epidemic. According to the Federal Communications Commission, 40% of robberies across the U.S. now involve smartphones. In 2012, Consumer Reports indicated that 1.6 million Americans were the victims of smart phone robberies, to the tune of more than \$30 billion.

As a result, starting in July of 2015, smart phones could be equipped with 'kill switches.' The technology allows a lost or stolen phone to have its data wiped remotely and render it inoperable. Once activated, the useless phone has no value to thieves on the black market. If the original owner recovers the device, it could be restored via the cloud.

At the same time, the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association, which represents the interests of the wireless industry, rolled out its own initiative: the Smartphone Anti-Theft Voluntary Commitment. The CTIA's own effort to deter smartphone thefts is supported by the country's largest wireless carriers, including Apple, Microsoft, Google, AT&T, Sprint, Verizon and Samsung.

While both government officials and wireless companies appear to agree on implementing kill switches to thwart smart phone robberies, they disagree on how it should work. Government officials believe the function should be mandatory and only deactivated upon request by the consumer. The wireless industry, on the other hand, argues that the kill switch should be available, but not mandatory. The CTIA proposes that consumers request the kill switch to be activated or download it themselves.

I like the idea of the kill switch causing the phone to self-destruct, like the messages in 'Mission Impossible.' Apparently I'm the only one who thinks this is a good idea, however.

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