NEW YORK – Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and San Francisco District Attorney George Gascón revealed that new iPhones sold with iOS 8 will include Apple’s theft deterrent system, Activation Lock, as a default setting. This marks the first time in the history of the smartphone industry that theft deterrent technology is available by default on new products.

In addition to being standard on the new iPhone 6 and 6 Plus, newly-sold iPhones will also prompt users to upgrade to iOS 8. Additionally, the new operating system can also be installed on most previous models of iPhones beginning today.

“After months of work with the Secure Our Smartphones Initiative, Apple has taken a significant step forward in our shared effort to make dangerous and often deadly smartphone thefts a thing of the past,” said Attorney General Schneiderman. “By being the first manufacturer to make an effective theft deterrent a default setting on new products and making it available to customers using older products Apple is helping ensure the safety and security of their customers. For smartphone theft deterrents to fully work, they need to be widely adopted thereby removing the economic incentive for stealing them in the first place, which is why I strongly encourage consumers to install all available theft deterrent options and why every manufacturer should move as quickly as possible make similar features a default setting for their products.”

“This is a game changer,” said District Attorney George Gascón. “Apple device owners can look forward to a day in the near future when their smartphones won’t make them a target to opportunistic thieves. Apple
products are the most commonly targeted smartphones, so deploying this technology on a default basis will safeguard almost all iPhone users in the years ahead. This is a major development that will change behavior on the street and eventually turn around this violent epidemic. In the meantime, it is essential that smartphone users remain alert, and that older iPhone users enable Find My iPhone.”

Apple introduced Activation Lock with its iOS7 in September 2013. Activation Lock makes it harder for anyone to use or sell any iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch if it’s ever lost or stolen. With Activation Lock, any Apple ID and password are required before anyone can turn off Find My iPhone on a device, sign out of iCloud on a device or erase and reactivate a stolen device. Thus, consumers can in essence “brick” their phones making them worthless to thieves.

As co-chairs of the Secure Our Smartphone (S.O.S.) Initiative – an international partnership of law-enforcement agencies, elected officials and consumer advocates – Attorney General Schneiderman and District Attorney Gascón led the effort to call on the wireless industry to address the global rise in smartphone thefts. The ultimate goal of SOS is for every mobile device to have a “kill switch” on by default. A default solution is imperative because it ensures that the device will be worthless to thieves.

In a June 2014 report by the S.O.S. Initiative, new data showed that criminals now target devices not likely to be equipped with a kill switch. In New York, London and San Francisco, robberies and grand larcenies involving iPhones plummeted following the release of Apple’s Activation Lock while violent crimes against people carrying phones without a kill switch surged. This demonstrated the importance of immediately implementing life-saving technology by all manufacturers. Because kill switches are mostly available on a solely opt-in basis, not enough consumers are signing-up. Kill switches must be a standard opt-out function on all phones and other mobile devices.

The Secure Our Smartphones Initiative is a groundbreaking coalition of state attorneys general, major city mayors, district attorneys, major city police chiefs, state and city comptrollers, public safety activists and consumer advocates from around the world. This initiative is working to encourage the industry to implement meaningful solutions that will end the national
epidemic of violent thefts of mobile communications devices such as smartphones and tablets.

For more information on efforts by Attorney General Schneiderman and District Attorney Gascón to combat “Apple Picking,” visit the New York State Attorney General’s website and the San Francisco District Attorney’s website.