



Apple to plug security hole that helped cops unlock iPhones

Beatrice Douglas

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In most cases, law enforcement would be unable to react fast enough.

In the upcoming release of iOS 12, Apple will change default settings on iPhones to shutter access to the USB port when the phone has not been unlocked for one hour.

The feature was first discovered ElcomSoft's Oleg Afonin earlier this year, who noted that an iPhone with USB Restricted Mode enabled won't bring up the usual "Trust this computer" prompt until the device is unlocked using a passcode, Touch ID or Face ID.

This means that users can still charge their phones, but will not be able to continue to transfer data to and from their device until they enter the passcode.

This is how machines made by forensic companies GrayShift, Cellebrite and others connect and get around the securityprovisions that limit how many password guesses can be made before the device freezes them out or erases data. According to Apple spokesman Fred Sainz, this fix is being issued to fix a security hole, not "frustrate" law enforcement efforts.

That conflict escalated in 2016, when Apple refused to comply with an Federal Bureau of Investigation request to unlock the iPhone of the San Bernardino gunman who killed 14 people in 2015.

The way Apple's latest security update works is that it locks the Lightning port when the device hasn't been unlocked for an hour. The FBI could not access the gunman's iPhone and asked for Apple's help.

Apple said that after it learned of the techniques, it reviewed the iPhone operating system code and improved security. "This is a really big vulnerability in Apple's phones", said Matthew D. Green, a professor of cryptography at Johns Hopkins University.

TNW yesterday reported iOS is getting a security update to block hardware that can unlock an iPhone without owner consent.

Experts worry there's more at stake than just whether law enforcement agents can unlock your phone. Access to this data can be paramount for the government to find and eliminate any possible threats. "But really there is no reason to think that only law enforcement will have such devices", said Julian Sanchez, senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

Zhang also predicts that Apple will ship around 80-85 million iPhone units in the second half of this year whilst producing around 100 million units. He said the phones had yielded crucial information, and he was upset that Apple planned to close such a useful investigative avenue. But the company has been a target of some in law enforcement for rejecting efforts to allow easy access to iPhones.