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BUSINESS CENTER Apr 20, 2011 3:57 pm

Is Smartphone Security Good Enough?

By [Keir Thomas, PCWorld](#)

Would you object if a police officer stopped you for speeding, then took your phone and cloned all its data--including photos, videos, e-mails, and recent GPS locations?

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If you get pulled over by the Michigan State Police, [this might be a reality](#), courtesy of handheld phone cloners that are designed for forensics use but which the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) claims are being used by patrol officers.

The ACLU has asked to see logs for any devices used this way, and the Michigan State Police responded by demanding half a million dollars to pay for retrieving the information. The ACLU has replied with a public letter ([PDF link](#)) mentioning constitutional rights and litigation, and that's where the matter rests at the moment.

It's alleged that the police force is using [CelleBrite UFED](#) devices out in the field. The handheld tool can quickly clone the data stored on [more than 3000 different phone models](#), even if that data is protected by a PIN. It can even access

deleted data no longer accessible by the owner of the phone.

It should be noted that, in a [comment on the Popular Mechanics reporting of the issue](#), somebody claiming to be a former Michigan State Police officer says the ACLU has got it wrong, and that the police gave only five of the units, used in the forensic labs only after an arrest has taken place.



A CelleBrite UFED device attached to a phone.

Whatever the case, the advice is simple: If you're stopped by the police and they ask if they can search your phone, simply refuse. The ACLU implies that state police in Michigan are cloning phones not by forcing people to hand them over, but simply by asking. Remember that they might phrase the request obscurely--such as, "Do you mind if we take a quick look at your phone?"-- so be on your guard. However, the [whether cell phones are protected by the Fourth Amendment against searches](#) is still being hashed out in the courts.

Bigger questions are raised closer to home: Are cell phone manufacturers enacting enough

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technical barriers to protect the data on handsets from snoops, whether that's law enforcement or anybody else?

A lot of work has gone into protecting transmissions, but it's wrongly assumed that if a person or agency has physical access to the phone, then they can be trusted. This simply isn't the case.

Modern smartphones contain extremely personal records of our lives. [If Near Field Communications \(NFC\) take-off](#) then phones may literally become our wallets when we use them to pay for purchases.

It's not just about handsets. Are app creators doing enough to protect confidential data they generate? For example, [geolocation apps are all the rage right now](#), but are they protecting the GPS data we willingly record?

I decided to do a few tests. I attached my iPhone to a fresh Windows install and, after installing iTunes and [iPhone Explorer](#), a piece of software that makes accessible the iPhone's file system, I tried to see what I could find.

It was a shocking experience. I use the Navfree satellite navigation app, for example, and was able to easily uncover my "home" address--street name as well as latitude and longitude coordinates--as well as recently visited destinations. All of that was contained within simple text files on the iPhone. With similar ease, I was able to uncover my recent Yahoo Messenger conversations.

Remember: I was able to do all this by doing little more than plugging my iPhone into a computer via USB and installing easily available, entirely legal software. I could do the same with your iPhone, provided I have access to it for a moment or two.

In my cursory explorations I wasn't able to view e-mails, and this is probably because the iPhone incorporates [Data Protection](#), which encrypts e-mails and any attachments. Indeed, the iPhone has encryption built into the hardware along with an application programmer interface (API) allowing programmer access to this feature, allowing theoretically easy access for apps. However, it appears few make use of it.

My iPhone isn't jailbroken but I understand that even more data is freely accessible on such phones. I doubt many people consider this when choosing to jailbreak.

To be fair, iPhones set with a passcode are inaccessible to iTunes (and therefore iPhone Explorer) unless some first enters the passcode on the device. But how many people use this feature, which can make activating the phone for use each time a slightly annoying experience?



Google Android phones are no better. Android 3.0 will bring with it some powerful encryption features, and there's [talk of a new open-source project called Guardian](#) that will add fundamental encryption to Android and could be integrated into Android devices by handset manufacturers. But right now Android phones and tablets have almost no data protection.

RIM BlackBerry phones offer a [much higher standard of protection](#), perhaps because they're aimed at enterprise users, and there's the rub. Data encryption on phones tends to be seen as an enterprise-level feature, where it's employed to protect employer data--and often in response to legislation.

However, every level of user can reasonably demand the same level of data protection.

Modern ARM processors used in most phones have encryption routines built into them, making data protection operations very simple to integrate without requiring huge amounts of battery power. So there's really is very little reason not to encrypt data.

Systems need to change, and handset manufacturers need to start taking the issue of data security far more seriously. Ultimately, it should be impossible for anybody--including law enforcement officers--to access our data without our express permission.

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 **Keir Thomas** has been writing about computers for the past decade in magazines, on Websites, and in books. He currently publishes [99-cent Kindle eBooks](#). His Twitter feed is [@keirthomas](#)..

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By **YungNattynkra**

Wed Apr 20 20:49:57 PDT 2011

It underscores the vulnerabilities of our newest technology and the the opportunistic tendencies of the government. its quite sad that you were safer with a pen and agenda book and a analog motorola phone.

It also shows that there needs to be more laws against theft of information , if our information is not considered property than our privacy will soon become worthless.

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