

The "Kill Switch" Bill: What it means to first responders and public safety

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In June 2010, Senator Joe Lieberman introduced Senate Bill 3480, titled [Protecting Cyberspace as a National Asset Act of 2010](#). Lieberman and cosponsors Senator Thomas Carper and Senator Susan Collins contend that the bill is intended to establish a set of guidelines for the United States in the event of a large-scale cyber attack. However, it has been dubbed the "kill switch" bill because of the power it would give the president in the event of such an attack. Essentially, the kill switch would shut down the Internet in order to prevent those with hostile intentions from succeeding in their attack.

The "kill switch" bill has gotten a significant amount of press over the past few months, and opponents of it have increased following the protests in Egypt. The Egyptian government shut down the Internet, preventing protestors from using social media sites such as [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). Advocacy groups claim that such a bill would give the president too much power and violate free speech laws.

Egypt had only four major Internet service providers, which the government was able to shut down. In the U.S., there are more than 2,000 Internet providers, and bringing them to a screeching halt would not only damage their networks, but damage public safety efforts. Public safety officials rely on the Internet and other public safety networks in the event of an emergency as well as in their day-to-day tasks. If a large-scale cyber attack was committed against the U.S., shutting down networks would likely induce panic and require immediate response from public safety officials. In order to keep first responders up and running in such an incident, a nationwide back-up communications network and equipment would be necessary. The prospect of building such a network, especially in the current economy, seems next to impossible.

Another important issue is the fact that so many government agencies, specifically public safety agencies, use social media to communicate with constituents. By using social media, an agency can inform the public of a wanted felon, a car accident that blocks a main thoroughfare, or any other type of emergency situation. Through the use of Twitter, an agency can also receive tips and other information that is often location based through the use of global positioned satellites (GPS) in cell phones. Enacting this bill would restrict agencies from being able to communicate with fellow first responders and the public. Having Twitter, Facebook and other tools like Reverse 911 is essential in a disaster or emergency, and with the Internet shut down, all of these tools would be unusable. This must be considered when law makers vote on the "kill switch" bill.

While the "kill switch" bill is unlikely to pass due to the democratically controlled Senate and the veto power of the president, it has stirred the pot and created a nationwide debate. Sen. Lieberman may have realized it is unlikely the bill he authored will pass, but in presenting it to the 111th and 112th Congresses, debate surrounding the bill will not stop as easily.