April 11, 2012

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2322-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Waxman:

I am writing in response to your letter of March 23, 2012 in which you requested information pertaining to Research In Motion's (RIM) practices related to lost and stolen smartphones. RIM thanks you for the opportunity to provide information related to BlackBerry® smartphones.

Since the BlackBerry smartphone was introduced in 2002, smartphone use has exploded in the United States and globally. Consumers continue to increasingly choose smartphones over devices with more limited functionality. Capabilities such as web browsing, applications, email, mobile banking, document review and composition, in addition to the ability to text or make a phone call, make smartphones the logical choice for many consumers. Unfortunately, these capabilities could make BlackBerry smartphones and other devices attractive targets for thieves who may look to then sell the stolen devices. The same could also be said for devices that are lost.

BlackBerry smartphones are designed to give the user the maximum experience while also enabling them to keep their data and personal information protected. As described in detail below, RIM's products provide numerous features for users and/or airtime service providers that could impact lost or stolen devices, and RIM continues to innovate in this area.

Protecting Devices Prior to Theft or Loss

BlackBerry smartphones have long been known to provide users with strong security through native data encryption. Our technology is trusted by the U.S. federal government and most of the Fortune 500 as well.

All BlackBerry smartphone models offer users the option to set up a password to protect their device. Password protection, if a "strong" password that cannot be easily guessed by others is used by the device owner, is the easiest way to keep others from accessing private information on a smartphone that has been lost or stolen. Password protection can also serve as a deterrent to theft taking place in the first place. By default on BlackBerry smartphones, password authentication is limited to ten attempts, after which the device memory and user data is erased. As such, if a device is stolen and the thief attempts to "guess" the password, the BlackBerry smartphone software itself includes protective features to automatically erase user data if the password is input incorrectly more than the allowable limit.

Clint Robinson, **Vice President**, **Government Relations** | Tel.: (202) 942-0312 | Fax (202) 942-0309 | Email: clrobinson@rim.com
Research In Motion Corporation | 1050 K Street, NW | Floor 10, Suite 1000 | Washington, D.C., 20001

RIM encourages BlackBerry users to set up a password during device activation by including information on the password set up process as part of the in-box "quick start guide" that accompanies new devices. RIM is also working with its industry partners to identify further ways to encourage BlackBerry users to set up passwords on their devices, including continued emphasis on educational efforts.

RIM's products which are targeted at enterprise customers also facilitate the use of device passwords. Enterprises that utilize a BlackBerry Enterprise Server ("BES") can require by way of IT policy the BlackBerry smartphones associated with the BES to have a password. Furthermore, through RIM's product called Mobile Fusion, IT administrators can also enforce the use of passwords on both BlackBerry smartphones and non-BlackBerry smartphones.

In addition, as is noted by the BlackBerry Internet Service ("BIS") Security Feature Overview[1] and Security Technical Overview[2], if a BlackBerry smartphone user sets up encryption of their BlackBerry device data using the content protection feature, the BlackBerry device is designed to be protected against users with malicious intent who could attempt to steal data directly from the internal hardware. Because the device password is required to read the encrypted data, this provides users with an additional level of protection if their device is lost or stolen.

Protecting Devices After Theft or Loss

In the event that a device is lost or stolen, BlackBerry products provide the user with a number of ways to help protect their personal information. Individual consumers who utilize the BlackBerry Internet Service users may take advantage of BlackBerry Protect®, which is an application and service that allows users to locate, and/or remotely lock and wipe lost or stolen BlackBerry smartphones that are within wireless coverage. BlackBerry Protect also offers users a convenient means of regularly backing up the information on their device, and recovering that information in the event their device is lost or stolen. BlackBerry Protect is pre-loaded on all current BlackBerry models delivered to U.S. carriers, and most older devices can download the application for free from the BlackBerry AppWorld application store.

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[1] Online:
http://btsc.webapps.blackberry.com/btsc/viewdocument.do?noCount=true&externalId=en14212BlackBerryIntern
etService-SecurityFeatureOverview--787371-0205030634-001-
3&sliceId=pdfPage9&cmd=displayKC&dialogID=70809&docType=kc&isLoadPublishedVer=&stateId=70811&docTyp
eID=DT_PRODUCTDOCUMENTATION_1_1&ViewedDocsListHelper=com.kanisa.apps.common.BaseViewedDocsList
HelperImpl

[2] Online:
http://btsc.webapps.blackberry.com/btsc/viewdocument.do?noCount=true&externalId=en25915BlackBerryIntern
etService-SecurityTechnicalOverview--1204011-0309103540-001-
4&sliceId=pdfPage14&cmd=displayKC&dialogID=70809&docType=kc&isLoadPublishedVer=&stateId=70811&docTy
peID=DT_PRODUCTDOCUMENTATION_1_1&ViewedDocsListHelper=com.kanisa.apps.common.BaseViewedDocsLis
tHelperImpl

With BlackBerry Protect, individual consumers have greater peace of mind regarding options to safeguard their personal information if their device is lost or stolen. They also have certain "self service" means of attempting to locate and recover their device. For RIM's enterprise customers, the BlackBerry Enterprise Server and BlackBerry Mobile Fusion also provides the ability for IT administrators to remotely lock and wipe devices associated with such products, to help prevent the compromise of such data.

So whether the user is a consumer using BlackBerry Protect, or an enterprise BlackBerry customer using a BlackBerry Enterprise Server and BlackBerry Mobile Fusion, RIM has provided tools for misplaced, lost or stolen device to be locked, wiped and the data remotely stored. It is likely that such products that are designed to remotely lock and wipe devices will help to decrease the resale value of stolen smartphones, and possibly help lower the number of smartphone thefts.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to address these issues. As detailed above, BlackBerry smartphones offer several tools users can employ to protect their devices and their personal information in the event that their devices are lost or stolen. In addition, RIM continually works with our carrier partners around the world to find ways to improve the customer experience, as carriers would typically be best placed to authenticate the identity of users who claim to be the owner of a device that has been stolen. We will continue to explore and act in coordination with our carrier partners, and where appropriate law enforcement, to identify and where possible implement additional measures we can use to help combat the threat of device theft. We hope our answers are helpful to the Committee's consideration of these issues. Please let me know if we can ever be of any further assistance to you.

Sincerely,
RESEARCH IN MOTION LIMITED
Per:

Clint Robinson
Vice President, Government Relations

Cc:

Congresswoman Anna Eshoo
Congressman Edward Markey