Europe calls for mandatory 'kill switches' on robots

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Europe is preparing for a robot revolution.

European lawmakers have proposed that robots be equipped with emergency "kill switches" to prevent them from causing excessive damage. Legislators have also suggested that robots be insured and even be made to pay taxes.

Main proposition

“To ensure that robots are and will remain in the service of humans, we urgently need to create a robust European legal framework”, Mady Delvaux, the parliamentarian who authored the proposal.

What lawmakers have proposed:

✓ A new charter on robotics that would give engineers guidance on how to design ethical and safe machines.
✓ Designers should include "kill switches" so that robots can be turned off in emergencies.
✓ They must also make sure that robots can be reprogrammed if their software doesn't work as designed.
✓ Designers, producers and operators of robots should generally be governed by the "laws of robotics" described by science fiction writer Isaac Asimov.
✓ A compulsory insurance scheme -- similar to car insurance -- that would require producers and owners to take out insurance to cover the damage caused by their robots.
What Isaac Asimov said:

Asimov's laws stipulate that a robot must never harm or kill a human and always obey orders from its creator. Robots must protect their own existence -- unless doing so would cause harm to a human.

Emotional attachments

- Robots should always be identifiable as mechanical creations. That will help prevent humans from developing emotional attachments.
- "You always have to tell people that robot is not a human and a robot will never be a human," said Delvaux. "You must never think that a robot is a human and that he loves you."
- The report cites the example of care robots, saying that people who are physically dependent on them could develop emotional attachments.