



Exploding The Phone

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Bibliographic Cover Sheet

Title **A.T.&T. defends taps of illegal calls**

Publication *Chicago Tribune*

Date 1975-02-04

Abstract AT&T monitored and recorded millions of calls in an attempt to stop toll fraud.

Keywords American Telephone & Telegraph Co. (AT&T); William Mullane (press relations director, AT&T); blue box; toll fraud; St. Louis, MO; New York, NY; Detroit, MI; Miami, FL; Los Angeles, CA; Newark, NJ

Source ProQuest

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Battle against fraud

A. T. & T. defends taps of illegal calls

NEW YORK [UPI]—A spokesman for American Telephone & Telegraph Co. said Monday that millions of long-distance calls monitored by the company between 1965 and 1970 were "illegal phone calls and therefore not under the protection of the law."

William Mullane, press relations director at A. T. & T., said the Bell Telephone System, in an effort to combat toll call frauds, installed equipment that would emit a tone when illegal devices, sometimes known as "blue boxes," were used by callers to avoid charges.

The tone would alert investigators, who would then record up to 90 minutes of the conversation and trace the source of the call, Mullane said.

In Washington, Kelley Griffith, deputy chief of the Federal Communications Commission's Common Carrier Bureau, said the courts have upheld such eavesdropping under Title 18 of the Omnibus Crime Act, Section 25-11.

Among purposes for which a telephone company may eavesdrop is "the protection of the rights and property of any carrier," Griffith said.

MULLANE'S STATEMENT followed a report by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that Bell

had monitored at random more than 30 million long distance calls originating in six cities, and secretly tape-recorded parts of at least 1.5 million calls.

The newspaper said only a tiny fraction of the calls recorded were ever confirmed by the company as fraudulent. It said cities where calls were monitored were St. Louis, New York, Detroit, Miami, Los Angeles, and Newark.

"The only calls recorded

were illegal phone calls, and therefore were not protected by law," Mullane said.

HE SAID 500 cases of toll fraud, involving millions of calls, were developed from charges made by A. T. & T. He said he believed all of the cases had either been settled in court or with retribution by the defendants.

The practice of monitoring calls with the tone device ended in 1970, Mullane said, "because we found a better way

to do it."

The new procedure, according to Mullane, does not require the actual recording of voices. Instead, he explained, the presence of illegal equipment on a phone line is noted on the computer tape that keeps a record of calls for billing purposes.

In this way, Mullane said, persons defrauding the company can be traced without resorting to the taping of conversations.