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Title **Phone Company Says It Has Pulled The Plug on Free-Call 'Blue Boxes'**

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Abstract New York Telephone Company demonstrates its anti-blue box technology. Article describes how blue boxes work and the history of the blue box technology.

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Phone Company Says It Has Pulled The Plug on Free-Call 'Blue Boxes'

By E. J. DIONNE JR.

The New York Telephone Company said yesterday that it had won the 16-year-old guerrilla war with "phone freaks" who developed ingenious devices called "blue boxes" which allowed them to make free telephone calls to any place in the world.

At a news conference at company headquarters on the Avenue of the Americas at 42d Street, company investigators demonstrated how counter-technology could be used to make free calls to anywhere in the direct-dialable world. They then showed off a product of their counter-counter technology—their ultimate weapon, which they asserted would stop the use of blue boxes once and for all.

The devices are usually pushbutton affairs, often converted pocket calculators, which produce tones exactly matching the phone company's code sounds.

The tones sent through the line by a blue box fool the company's computer into thinking that a toll-free call is being made while at the same time connecting the caller to desired (and often far-off) points.

According to a spokesman for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, blue boxes cost the nationwide Bell System \$5 million to \$10 million a year. About half that loss has been in New York State, according to the spokesman.

But no longer, the investigators said. Their breakthrough is a detection device that breaks through the protective electronic fog set up by the

blue box and finds out within seconds both the number of the phone being used for the fraudulent call and the number to which the call is placed.

This information is printed out by a computer, along with the time and length of the call. The illicit caller is immediately notified by the company that his call has been discovered, that he will be billed, and that he should stop using the machine.

Improvements Since 1961

The first device of this sort was discovered by phone company officials in 1961. It was painted blue, hence the name. Over the years its technology has been developed along with the company's. At yesterday's news conference, officials displayed several generations of blue boxes. The early ones were bulky vacuum-tube models, about three times the size of a toaster. The latest models are about the size of a pack of cigarettes and use transistors or integrated circuits.

Most of the models work through toll-free 800 or 555 numbers. Some work on the receiving end, sending off sounds to the phone company indicating that no call has taken place even as a conversation goes on.

The company says its new anti-blue-box devices—developed by Bell Laboratories in New Jersey and now in use in other parts of the country—will detect all known types of blue boxes, and can trace calls even to coin-box telephones.