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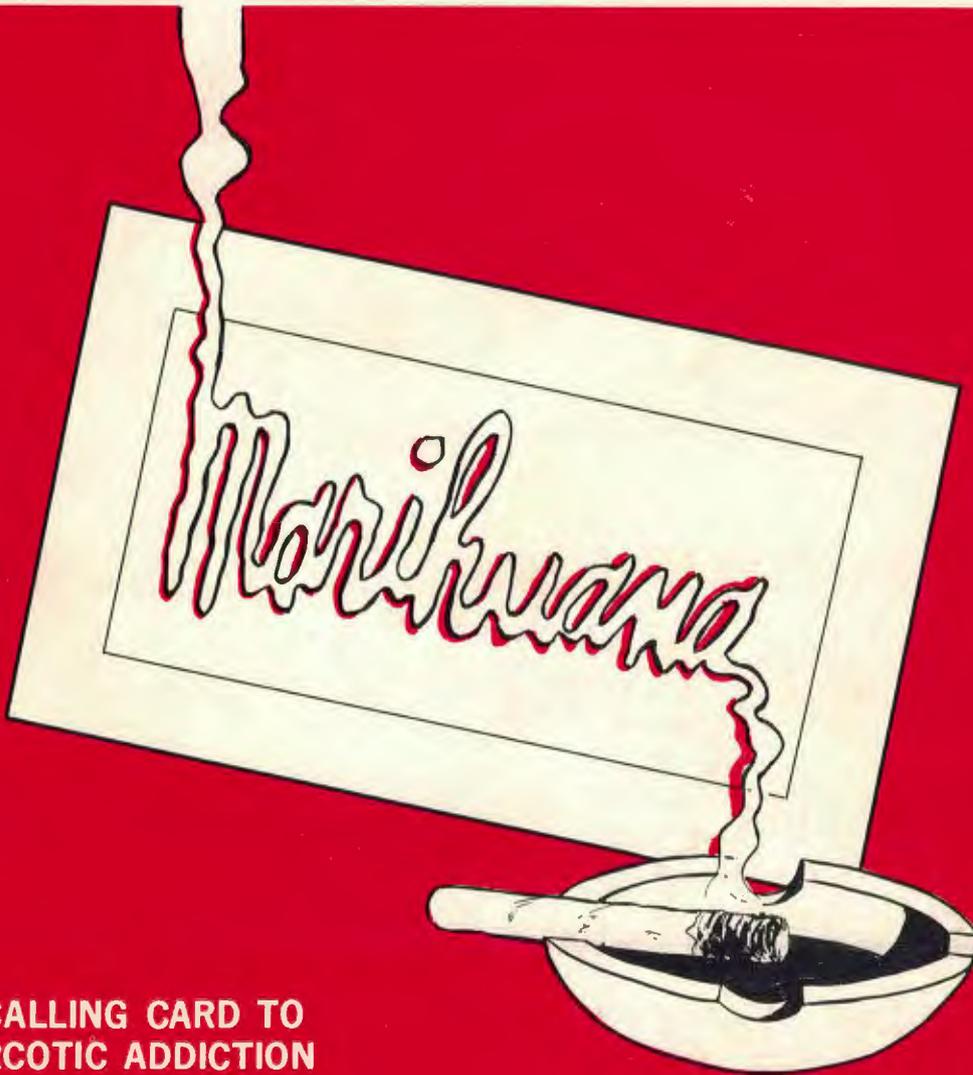
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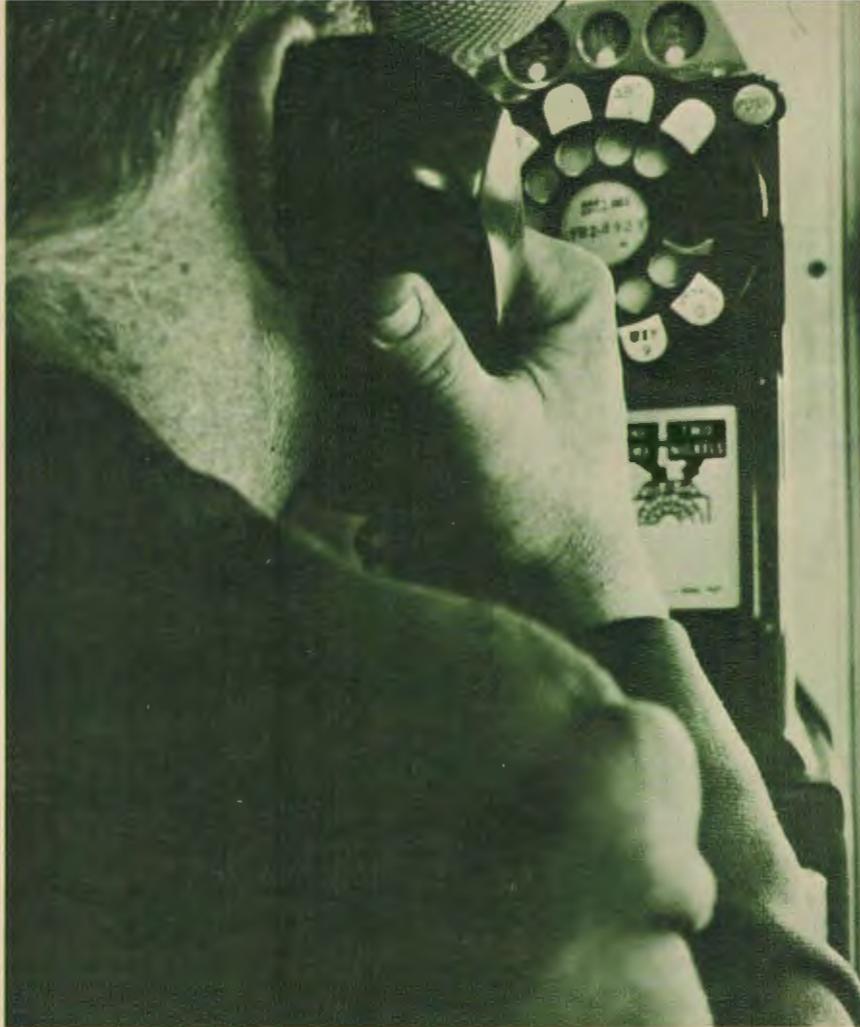
# FBI

## LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN



**A CALLING CARD TO  
NARCOTIC ADDICTION**

**FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
J. EDGAR HOOVER, DIRECTOR**



# Abusive Telephone Calls

By

**JAMES A. HANDLOSER\***

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The current "war" on those who make obscene, threatening, or harassing telephone calls is paying off. Cooperation between law enforcement officials and telephone people resulted in the arrest of nine of these callers last year in Arkansas phone booths alone.

Telephone companies and law enforcement officials throughout the Nation are making it increasingly difficult for people who use the telephone to place anonymous and annoying calls. Police officers, the courts, State legislatures, and specially trained telephone company employees are all playing important roles in combating these calls.

Recently developed technical skills are also helping in the current war on annoyance callers. And results of the war are beginning to show. In 1967, for example, Southwestern Bell, which serves 900 exchanges in Mis-

souri, Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, and Arkansas, handled more than 58,000 annoyance calls complaints. In Arkansas alone these complaints resulted in 45 convictions, ranging from the "hang-up" and "breather" types to obscene calls and bomb threats.

Overall, in the areas served by the Bell system, the courts convicted 358 abusive callers during 1965, 788 abusive callers in 1966, and 1,105 during 1967.

For the law enforcement official, this increased emphasis on all fronts to eliminate these annoyance calls is providing him with more effective

tools with which to work. He has the full cooperation and the total resources of the telephone company, including a comprehensive public education program, skilled technicians, specially trained representatives in the business office, and security people like myself who work with officers assigned to these cases.

\*Mr. Handloser is a native of Detroit, Mich., and a graduate of the University of Detroit School of Law. He became Southwestern Bell's security manager for Arkansas in December 1964. His duties include investigations concerning: theft of coin telephones; fraudulent use of telephone credit cards; slug usage; sabotage of buildings and equipment; theft of equipment and supplies; and obscene, threatening, or harassing telephone calls.



Special line identification equipment enables a telephone company switchman to identify the specific telephone from which an annoyance call was placed.



Mr. Handloser.

Legislatures, too, have helped. All 50 States now have laws making it illegal to place annoying, harassing and/or obscene telephone calls. A similar law making it a Federal criminal offense to place obscene or harassing telephone calls in interstate or foreign commerce or in the District of Columbia was enacted on May 3, 1968.

Our statute\* here in Arkansas, which is quite similar to others around the country, is comprehensive enough to include:

Anonymous calls, including "hang-up" and "breather" calls, prank calls, calls to

merchants ordering unwanted goods, bomb threats, threats of physical violence, and any other type of harassing call.

Repeated calls not for lawful business purposes, including harassing calls in which the caller is known to the victim.

Obscene calls, whether anonymous or not.

Our Arkansas courts have been most sympathetic to the annoyance call problem. Judges in these cases have been very solicitous of the victim, particularly a woman or child, and have allowed the obscenities to be described in general terms rather than repeated in specific words. When the exact words are needed in the record, the judges usually take the parties into chambers to avoid the embarrassment of repeating them in open court.

This knowledge on the part of the victim has been an effective aid to police officers in encouraging the victims of these calls to press charges. And judges, such as Little Rock Municipal Judge Quinn Glover, regularly commend the victims in open court for doing their civic duty in coming forward to testify in this day and age when the trend is not to get involved.

The Bell system, of course, has always been concerned with annoying calls, since they are an infringement of our commitment to provide the best possible telephone service.

Armed with new-line identification techniques, in mid-1966 the system embarked on an employee and public education program de-

\*Arkansas Statutes, Section 41-1437, Abusive Language, "It shall be unlawful for any person to make use of telephone facilities or equipment (1) for an anonymous call or calls if in a manner reasonably to be expected to annoy, abuse, torment, harass or embarrass one or more persons, or (2) for repeated calls, if such calls are not for a lawful business purpose but are made with intent to abuse, torment, harass or embarrass one or more persons, or (3) for any comment, request, suggestion or proposal which is obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy or indecent."

Section 41-1438 provides a penalty therefor of not more than \$1,000, imprisonment of not more than 1 year, or both.

signed to assist victims and to bring offenders face to face with the law.

### **Training**

In Southwestern Bell the war on annoyance callers required special training for almost 26,000 employees. Business office representatives were trained to take annoyance call complaints and to counsel and advise customers about the steps they could take. Employees in switching offices were acquainted with line identification equipment and trained in its use. Traffic operators were trained to handle customer complaints during those hours when the business office is not open.

While each Bell system company handles the annoyance calling problem a little differently, depending on the circumstances involved, telephone company assistance generally begins with a call by the victim to the local business office. The customer is first assured that the company is concerned and every effort will be made to help solve his problem.

Through a series of questions, the business office representative, much like the police officer, must develop the facts needed to resolve a particular complaint. The representative determines the frequency of such calls; time of day calls are received; variations, if any, in the calling pattern; relationship of calling time to members of the family present; or any recent publicity about a member of the family. Evaluation of this information will aid the representative in determining what further steps are necessary to solve the customer's problems.

When only one or two abusive calls have been received, it is our experience that such calls are usually discontinued after a few attempts. This is particularly true if the person called refuses to give the caller any satisfaction and hangs up immediately.

If there have been a number of calls over a period of time, however, the service representative will request that the customer keep a record of all abusive calls received during the next several days. Where the customer reports receiving very few calls with no

pattern, a temporary or permanent number change may be suggested.

If the customer has recorded several calls on the log, and if the information indicates to the telephone company that it is appropriate, an attempt will be made to identify the calling number. In these cases consent of the person called must first be obtained.

### **Filing Complaints**

Here in Arkansas most law enforcement agencies also have asked that annoyed customers be encouraged to lodge a complaint with local police. Having a complaint on file facilitates police action when a calling line is identified.

When a customer reports this matter to the police, there is an excellent chance that a thorough interview by the police officer, especially in the case of the harassing-type call, can establish the probable identity of the caller, or at least the motive. While it is true that most obscene calls are made at random and the victim is not usually known to the caller, strangers do not ordinarily take the trouble to harass someone by calling night after night just to get him out of bed and then hang up. Harassing-call victims often are reluctant to admit that they have a suspect in mind, but effective interviewing by the police officer may help a victim recall who might have a motive to make such calls.

### **Thorough Interview**

For example, one particularly thorough interview established that a victim's "hang-up" calls coincided with the nightly barking of his dog. The police narrowed the suspects to the immediate neighborhood and were able to more easily identify the caller, who, in fact, lived right next door.

Those complaints involving the receipt of a serious threat—bodily harm, kidnapping, or damage to property—

Mr. Handloser works closely with Little Rock Chief of Police R. E. Brians, a graduate of the FBI National Academy, whose men have done an outstanding job of catching annoyance and obscene callers.



demand, and get, immediate attention. Local police are notified, either by the customer or the telephone company with the customer's authorization. Also, arrangements are begun by the telephone company to identify the calling line.

### **Techniques Used**

There are several methods of determining the calling line, depending on the type of telephone switching equipment involved. Generally, however, two techniques are employed: trouble simulation and manual identification.

Where the trouble simulation techniques are used, Southwestern Bell simply makes extended use of its intricate trouble reporting equipment. A trouble condition is simulated on the complaining customer's line. Calls to that customer then go through a "trouble-recorder" which punches out a computer card with the incoming trunk number, called line number, and time of the call.

When the company utilizes trouble equipment, it is important that the customer keep an exact log of all his incoming calls, both legitimate and harassing. A simple comparison of the time an annoyance call is received with the time recorded on the punch card will identify the telephone from which the annoyance call was placed.

### **Manual Identification**

Certain other switching offices, on the other hand, require use of a manual identification technique. In this situation, a tiny polarity device placed on the customer's line locks the calling line into the connection. Even if the calling receiver is placed on the hook, the connection cannot be broken. It usually takes a matter of minutes for the call to be identified as coming from a specific telephone if the calling line is within the same telephone exchange.

Public and employee education is an important part of a security manager's job in eliminating annoyance and obscene calls. Other employees should be briefed on the company's public advertising program.



It must be emphasized that there is no listening-in, or monitoring, of conversations involved in the various line identification techniques utilized by the Bell system. The telephone company is able to identify the telephone from which the annoyance call was placed, not the identity of the caller.

Once the originating telephone is identified, Arkansas telephone people notify local police if this action is authorized by the customer. Source of the calls—except in unusual cases—is not given to the customer.

### **Investigation**

Certainly in the course of his investigation, the police officer may inform the victim of the telephone from which annoyance calls have been placed. In a number of cases, the victim can facilitate the investigation at the calling number by telling the officer who, at the identified number, might have reason to place such calls.

If the case is sufficiently serious (obscene, or involving a threat of harm), speed and time are important for both the police and the phone company. The company must identify the calling number quickly, and law enforcement officials must reach the calling telephone as soon as possible to catch a person actually in the process of making the call.

Depending on how quickly the officer is able to reach the identified phone, he should attempt to talk to the victim over the held connection and establish:

The victim's identity.

The length of the call.

Whether or not the victim has spoken with anyone else.

That the victim has indeed "held" the call.

Calls traced to a public telephone further increase the requirements for speed. They also bring on additional hazards for investigating officers, for even the slightest hint of detection can send an annoyance caller out of

a phone booth in one quick step and back into the role of an innocent citizen.

Callers can be caught inside phone booths, however. It was done nine times in Arkansas last year. In either case, officers must realize that their arrival at a public phone, or a private residence, is for the purpose of making an investigation and not an immediate arrest. Nothing could prove more hazardous than to seize an individual in a phone booth and find he had only seconds before walked into that booth to make a legitimate, lawful call.

### **Obscene Calls**

Even though obscene callers usually dial their victims at random, they often display some pattern in these calls (at least in the language used), and it is important, therefore, that a specific officer, or group of officers, work on all obscene call cases. One arrest will often clear up a hundred complaints. Several Arkansas police departments have found it very effective to assign obscene call cases to officers working on deviant sex cases.

Often, persons who make obscene phone calls are slightly abnormal. The substance of their calls—the language used, the suggestions made—is revolting to the average citizen. Persons receiving such calls are generally caught completely off guard and tend to become frightened and overimaginative. They sometimes feel that the caller knows them personally and is probably watching them and waiting for an opportunity to enter their home.

Obscene calls are serious, and there always exists the possibility that the obscene caller is dangerous. The police officer should not take complaints about such calls lightly. Arkansas police officers handling these cases do much to calm the victim by pointing out that the caller usually has no intention of confronting the called party.

These officers recall many surveillances of meetings arranged by the victim in which the caller failed to appear, even though the victim seemed receptive to his suggestions.

Obscene callers, like other anonymous callers, are looking for a reaction. They are looking for an audience or a sympathetic ear. If these callers fail to get the satisfaction they are seeking—if the victim just hangs up quietly, without comment or any display of annoyance—they usually tire of this game.

### **Courses to Follow**

Once a prime suspect for annoyance calls has been established, there are three courses of action. First, the victim of the call can sign a complaint, and police working with a prosecuting attorney can arrange to take the case to court. It must be emphasized that the telephone company is not the offended party in the case and does not sign the complaint. It will, however, provide court witnesses to testify on identification of the calling line, although it cannot specifically identify the caller.

Second, depending on the seriousness of the call, a suspect might simply be confronted with the evidence in the case and be reminded of the appropriate laws and penalties. Regardless of who makes the confrontation, it is important that no accusations be made. Often—particularly when there is a teenager in the house making calls to the home of an ex-girlfriend, or some similar situation—this confrontation with the evidence is sufficient to halt the calls.

The third course of action is open only to the telephone company. Tariffs under which the company operates in a given State generally provide that telephone service is offered for lawful and legitimate purposes. When the company determines that there is a

violation of those tariffs, it can discontinue service. This action, however, is not always effective—particularly in the more serious cases of annoyance calls. All the individual has to do is find another telephone.

### **Suggestions Offered**

The Bell system, in its extensive public education program, which includes newspaper and magazine advertising and special booklets distributed in many of the States, offers these suggestions for dealing with annoyance calls.

1. Hang up immediately if the caller does not identify himself to your satisfaction, if he says nothing at all, or if he becomes obscene.
2. Do not slam the telephone down. This indicates that you are annoyed and may encourage subsequent calls. Explosion of firecrackers or the blowing of whistles into the ear of an annoyance caller is not encouraged as the caller may retaliate with similar action.
3. If the calls persist, call the telephone company business office.
4. If there is a threat of bodily harm or property damage, notify the police.

The public has responded favorably to these suggestions. Victims of annoyance calls are beginning to realize that it is virtually impossible to keep their telephones open to the calls they want to receive, without also keeping them open to undesirable calls. On the other hand, the average, law-abiding citizen realizes that his right to privacy must be protected, and that he can help in that protection by following a few simple suggestions.

The war on annoyance callers is not over, but with continued technical developments and the continued cooperation of our courts and legislatures, telephone companies, and law enforcement officials, the war will be easier to fight.