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# Devon Man Held In Phone Fraud

A Devon man employed by the long lines department of American Telephone and Telegraph Co. in Wayne was among four persons arraigned early Tuesday on charges of defrauding the Bell Telephone Co. by making thousands of toll-free calls all over the world with a homemade device called a "blue box."

Francis E. Mitchell, 27, was arrested at 1 a.m. along with Kenneth M. Spacil, 19, of Glenmoore; Robert Helsm, 18, of Downingtown; and Mrs. Helen Williams, about 40, of West Chester, a toll traffic operator for Bell.

Arraigned at 1:30 a.m. before District Justice John F. Catanese of Coatesville, the three men were released on \$5,000 bail each. Mrs. Williams was released on \$1,000 bail. They were all charged with making fraudulent telephone calls, conspiracy, making, possessing and transferring a device designed for the theft of telecommunications services for other purposes, Catanese said.

A hearing is scheduled for the four at 11 a.m. Oct. 8, before Justice Catanese.

## 'World At Your Feet'

A spokesman for the telephone company said Tuesday a blue box is "about as big as your hand. It turns you into a toll operator and you have the world at your feet."

The blue boxes duplicate a set of tones that a long distance operator uses for switching a call. There is no charge or record of the call having taken place. Bell estimates that calls placed through the "blue boxes" have been costing the company \$2,000 a month.

The fraudulent calls were discovered Aug. 20 by a Bell switchman checking equipment in the West Chester central office for abnormal conditions. From that date until Tuesday, the company has been logging the evidence necessary to make the arrests.

"The kind of equipment needed to

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## Police Charge Devon Resident

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catch the 'blue boxes' has only been available for the past few weeks," the spokesman said.

Carl S. Teets, security manager for Bell, said this was the first time in Pennsylvania that persons possessing blue boxes are being prosecuted. Nationally, 57 cases are under investigation in 14 other states and at least one foreign country.

### Lose \$500,000 Annually

Teets estimated there are 200 to 250 of what he called "phone phreaks" in the country, causing the company nationally to lose \$500,000 a year from illegal calls.

The fad began about 12 years ago, the local spokesman said, "and it was all fun and games. Some 'phreaks' apparently like to listen to all the sounds a phone system makes in building up a long, long distance phone call. Others like to call all over the world for no particular reason." He added that the company's greatest concern right now is that the "phreaks" can seriously tie up normal service.