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Abstract       Overview of AT&T's toll fraud surveillance system and Michigan Bell's participation in it.

Keywords      Detroit; wiretapping; American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T); St. Louis; New York; Los Angeles; Newark, NJ; Miami; Michigan Bell Telephone Co. (MB); Kenneth J. Boekeloo (Pres., MB); William P. Mullane, Jr.; blue box; Pic Wagner (spokesman, MB); Greenstar

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# Bell Listened In For Toll Cheats

BY JOHN E. POLICH

Free Press Staff Writer

Long-distance calls from every Detroit residential and business telephone were potential targets for tapping by the American Telephone & Telegraph Co. for two years beginning in 1965, Michigan Bell confirmed Sunday.

A Bell spokesman said the Detroit surveillance was part of an "experimental" program to identify persons who used electronic devices to avoid charges for calls. Surveillance was also conducted in St. Louis, New York, Los Angeles, Newark and Miami, according to the American Telephone & Telegraph Co.

The taping of parts of perhaps 1.5 million suspicious calls, which did not end in other cities until 1970, was revealed Sunday by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

**MICHIGAN BELL** Vice-President Kenneth J. Boekeloo said Sunday: "The company was being ripped off in amounts of several hundreds of thousands of dollars a year" in expanding schemes that could have eventually cost Michigan Bell millions annually.

"We were simply protecting our customers against the

cheaters," Boekeloo said. "In identifying and prosecuting people who were cheating us and the public, no laws were violated and no illegal monitoring of innocent customers took place."

AT&T press relations director William Mullane said the taping system took a random sample from calls on all out-bound trunk, or long-distance, lines. "What you do is scan these and tape for 10 seconds or so and if you get a certain signal, you know they're using a 'blue box' to bypass electronic billing equipment."

In those cases, master recorders taped further into the calls, he said.

"Blue boxes" use solid-state electronics to generate tones

that trigger Bell System equipment and avoid tolls.

**HE WOULD NOT** explain what signal tripped the recorders. "That's the combination to the safe," Mullane said. The Post-Dispatch suggested this could be done inadvertently by innocent callers whose voice happened to pass through certain frequencies.

"That's the most remote outside possibility I could think of," Mullane said. "It's like the North Vietnamese invading San Francisco."

However, the Post-Dispatch reported that AT&T analysts regarded only about 25,000 of the 1.5 million recorded conversations as illegally placed,

and only about 500 cases were confirmed.

Mullane said the figures were "within the ballpark," but pointed out that 500 cases could include many calls.

**MICHIGAN BELL** spokesman Pic Wagner said the Detroit tapes were shipped to New York. "No one here ever listened to conversations or tapes," he said. "We had no files on it. We had no records out here except specific fraud cases referred back out here by New York."

Wagner said Sunday it was his understanding that only the opening seconds of calls were recorded to identify the telephones involved, rather than recording entire conversations.

He said that if there was no indication of fraud, the calls were not taped.

Mullane said, "If they placed an illegal call, they're not within the protection of the law because it's thievery." He added that he was sure there was no longer any monitoring of conversations for any purpose.