

Bugging big business

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SPRING CITY, Tenn. (AP) — Bugging is big business in America these days, says one counter-intelligence expert, and less than one percent of it is legally done.

"There's a jillion of these listening devices," Jesse Creech says. He's the founder of Creech Counter-Intelligence Inc., a rather startling small business in this sedate eastern Tennessee town.

"I would say 90 percent of the time we go on a sweep, we find something," he explains.

Creech says he retired to a countryside south of Oak Ridge after serving 30 years as a government agent.

He declines to name his former employer or to discuss what he did and he insists on taping interviews so he can send them to Washington for clearance.

Now Creech hires former intelligence officers to make sure that businesses and homes are free of unwanted ears.

"Many, many times, a used car salesman will leave you sitting in a cubbyhole while he goes back to talk to the boss about what kind of a deal they can get for you," he says. "And he and the boss are there in the back listening while you tell your wife that you'd buy that thing for \$200 less.

"Car salesmen, real estate salesmen, and finance people use it covertly," he says. "Of all the bugging and electronic

surveillance done today, less than one percent of it is done legally with a court order."

Bugs start simply with a \$21 wireless microphone sold over the counter in many electronic shops.

With materials readily available and a schematic, more sophisticated bugs can be built. "By using a condenser microphone, you can get a bug down to the actual size of a pinhead," Creech says.

And there is a black market for precision-made listening devices. One unit about the size of a domino can pick up a whisper 50 feet away and transmit it 1,000 feet to a booster transmitter or a

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says former agent

tape recorder with a sound-activated on-off switch, he says.

Another unit — once sold over the counter, but now sold only through security specialists — allows a person to dial a phone number and listen in through the telephone speaker.

"The phone never rings, but you have taken control of the telephone line and you can sit in your room and listen to everything that goes on in a house 5,000 miles away," Creech says. Such units now bring \$2,000 to \$10,000 on the black market.

"When someone picks up the phone, you merely release the line and he gets a dial tone."

Such invasion of personal privacy is

frightening, Creech says, but it makes for an exciting and rapidly growing business.

"This business is unlimited," he says simply. "I'll never live to see it reach its potential."