

Secrecy Lid Put on Anti-Eavesdrop

By Evans Witt
Associated Press

An inexpensive device designed to protect private conversations from eavesdropping is being kept off the market by the government because the nation's most secret intelligence agency claims the unit threatens national security.

"I cannot imagine any legitimate threat to national security from our devices," said William Raike, of Monterey, Calif., in a telephone interview. "In fact, it was designed so as to not threaten national security."

The government has issued a secrecy order against Raike and three other inventors, warning them not to discuss their device. If they do, they could be subject to prosecution.

The secrecy order is the third time in two years the National Security

Agency, the government's least-known spy agency, has moved to stifle a development in the obscure area of devices which protect conversations and computers from eavesdropping.

As is its usual practice, the NSA, the government agency in charge of codes, codebreaking and eavesdropping on foreign governments, had no comment on the latest incident.

Word of the secrecy order, issued by the U.S. Patent Office, first appeared in an article by Deborah Shapley in Science magazine.

Carl Nicolai, Carl Quate, David Miller, all of the Seattle area, and Raike developed the device for use by citizens band and other radios.

"We specifically invented this for nonmilitary, nongovernment applications . . . it's for individuals, for private use," Nicolai said.

The secrecy order prevents the four from discussing their device in any detail. About all any of them would say is that the device would cost less than \$100 and would easily work with currently available radios.

It could be adapted to work with telephone conversations, the inventors say.

The device apparently uses a new technique to scramble or encode the voices, so that an eavesdropper would hear nothing but garble. The intended recipient of the signal would also have one of the devices that would make the voice intelligible.

Voice scramblers are currently available, but they are expensive and have not been adapted for use such as CB radio.

The four inventors applied for a patent for their device, a necessary step in convincing a manufacturer to

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produce it. In March, they received the secrecy order.

Such orders are usually used to protect inventions developed under government contract or by government personnel from foreign intelligence agencies.

But that is not the case for this invention.

"I feel very strange about the law. It is extremely strange for it to be crime for inventing something—something that is totally privately funded—that means you lose your freedom of speech," said Nicolai in a telephone interview.

Letters from NSA to the inventors state that the agency is now reviewing the patent application to see if the original determination that the device jeopardized national security was correct.