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Postal Surveillance Placed Over 8,500 In Last Two Years

WASHINGTON, March 18 (UPI)—A Postal Service study showed today that Federal, state and local agencies requested more than 8,500 mail surveillances over the last two years.

The analysis of the use of "mail covers"—inspection of an individual's mail short of reading it—was presented to the House Civil Liberties subcommittee by William J. Cotter, chief postal inspector.

The subcommittee chairman, Robert W. Kastenmeier, said that the study included requests from organizations not usually associated with law enforcement, such as the Departments of Agriculture and Labor, the Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as state welfare agencies and a real estate commission.

In addition, the study showed that more than 250 mail covers for national security purposes had been ordered.

The Postal Inspection Service itself asked for more than three-fourths of the 431 court-ordered mail openings during this period. The rest of the mail covers, which do not need a court order, were requested by other agencies.

Mr. Cotter testified that each mail cover had been conducted under strict postal regulations that "provide procedural and substantive safeguards designed to insure the confidentiality of the mail cover process and prevent the unjustified use of mail covers."

MR. Kastenmeier recalled testimony earlier this year from the Director of Central Intelligence, William E. Colby, who said the Central Intelligence Agency had been reading the mail of selected American citizens for some 20 years.

"That this massive intrusion into personal privacy must be examined carefully is apparent from the fact that over 70 members of the House have sponsored legislation which would require judicial approval and Congressional scrutiny of all mail openings," Mr. Kastenmeier said.