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Private Detectives Are Found To Offer Illegal Wiretap Advice

WASHINGTON, June 25 (UPI)—A random check of 115 private detective agencies in seven cities turned up 42 that either had offered illegal wiretap service or had advised how it could be obtained, the National Wiretap Commission reported today. Congress established the commission to advise it on any needed legislation on electronic surveillance.

In investigating the agencies a commission staff member would telephone those listed in the telephone book's yellow pages tell the investigator that the caller was a local businessman who suspected he was being bugged by a competitor. The report said that 71 of the 115 firms had offered to debug the offices—clear them of any hidden microphones or other electronic surveillance devices. Many of the firms that refused to install wiretap devices were willing to explain how it could be done by the caller, the report said. The commission released the report amid a series of hearings it was conducting on the extent of illegal wiretapping and bugging in the country. The survey was conducted last April.

Earlier, manufacturers of wiretap and bugging equipment called for stronger laws to keep their sophisticated devices out of the hands of private detectives, husbands spying on wives, company espionage agents and the police who use them illegally.

The 1968 Omnibus Crime Control Act limits the sale of devices for eavesdropping that only the police can conduct lawfully, usually with a court warrant required. But industry spokesmen said that loopholes in the law were so wide that private citizens, company agents and the police bent on illegal investigations could buy them.

In testimony during the wiretap commission hearings, manufacturers' spokesmen called for licensing both makers and users of the equipment. Without this regulation, they said, the present ambiguities in the regulations will continue to make it hard for them to keep the devices from persons ineligible to have them.

The commission report on cities indicated that 18 of 28 agencies in Atlanta had offered debugging services and 14 had offered illegal bugging services. In Baton Rouge, La., five of nine offered debugging and four offered bugging services. In Philadelphia, 20 of 27 agencies offered debugging, 11 offered wiretapping and bugging and three who would not wiretap or bug referred the caller to agencies that would.

In Washington two of nine agencies were willing to wiretap and bug. In Miami four of seven agencies would debug and two indicated that they would wiretap and bug.

In New York six of eight agencies would debug and three offered to assist in wiretapping and bugging. In Los Angeles 16 of 19 would debug but none would provide electronic surveillance.

Some of the agencies contacted offered specialized services and did not deal with wiretaps at all. And some of the agencies would not perform bugging services themselves, but said that they would be willing to offer advice on how it could be done.

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