

A.T.&T. Describes Its Policy on

By RICHARD J. MEISLIN

The American Telephone and Telegraph Company, as a matter of national policy, recommends that its member companies release unlisted telephone numbers to law enforcement agencies or other governmental units that have subpoena power. The policy does not require that affiliates insist on subpoenas.

The policy, described by the company as "long standing," has never been articulated to subscribers who request that their numbers not be published, a company spokesman said yesterday.

The policy came to light after com-

plaints over the weekend by Representative Bella S. Abzug, Democrat of Manhattan, that the New York Telephone Company provides unlisted telephone numbers on demand to almost 50 Federal, State and local agencies, ranging from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency to the city's Taxi and Limousine Commission.

"We treat the information as confidential as far as we're concerned, and we only release it under valid legal process," said the spokesman, Donald Raymond.

The company defines "valid legal process" as subpoenas, search warrants, administrative summonses and "lawful

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1976

Releasing Unlisted Phone Numbers

demand," Mr. Raymond said. It is under the "lawful demand" provision that most of the telephone numbers are provided, he added.

"Generally, we recommend that companies ask for a valid legal process such as a subpoena," Mr. Raymond continued, "or if the agency has a law enforcement function, they will ask that they get a letter from [the agency] on their stationery, signed by the head of the agency or an official of the agency."

Mr. Raymond said that the tariffs regulating telephone company activities require that unpublished telephone numbers not be listed in the directory and not

be given out by operators. But he said that giving an unlisted telephone number to a government agency is not prohibited.

It is not known how many of the Bell System's 23 affiliated companies follow its guidelines on unlisted numbers.

According to telephone company figures, about 12 percent of the nation's residential numbers, and about 25 percent of those in New York City, are unpublished.

In New York City, Michael Clendenin, assistant vice president for public affairs of New York Telephone, said the company was "simply trying to cooperate with lawful authorities."

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to Law Enforcement Agencies

"It's never been an issue before," he said, "but it is a suitable subject for Congressional discussion. If the Congress enacts legislation that changes the ground rules, we'll certainly comply with it."

He said the company required a letter of confirmation from an agency requesting an unpublished number, and that such letters were kept on file for six months. He added that the company would advise customers with unpublished numbers, at their request, what agencies had obtained their numbers in the previous six months.

Mrs. Abzug, a candidate for the Democratic senatorial nomination in New York,

based her criticism of the company's policy on research by the House Government Information and Individual Rights Subcommittee, of which she is chairman.

"It is shocking that the privacy of customers receives so little consideration," she said, "and it is truly adding insult to injury to charge millions of dollars a year for supposedly keeping these numbers unlisted."

Mr. Raymond of A.T.&T. said that the service charge for unlisted numbers—93 cents a month in New York—covers the additional cost of keeping the number out of directories and unavailable to operators.