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Private Use of Wiretaps

Washington

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

The 1968 Omnibus Crime Control Act limits sale of devices "primarily useful" for interceptions that only police can make lawfully,

usually with a court warrant required. But industry spokesmen said loopholes in the law are so wide that private citizens, company agents and police bent on illegal investigations can buy them.

In testimony opening new hearings by the National Wiretap Commission on abuse of electronic surveillance, manufacturers' spokesmen called for licensing both makers and users

of the equipment. Without it, they said, present ambiguities in regulations could put them in a legal bind.

"As an example, infinity transmitters were sold as an intercept device and so advertised prior to the enactment of the (1968 act)", testified Jack Holcomb, president of Audio Intelligence Devices, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

"Now they are on the open

market as an alarm system which permits the user, ostensibly, to telephone his office or home to determine if a burglary is taking place," Holcomb said. "This is pure farce."

The wiretap commission said the device, also called a "harmonica bug," can be secreted in the base of a telephone. The person who planted it then can dial the phone number, activate the device and hear sounds in the room within a radius of 30 feet.

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