

Reporters Still Object

Policy Change on Phone Records

Washington

American Telephone & Telegraph Co. announced yesterday that it will no longer turn over to authorities the long-distance records of its customers in response to a written request.

Effective March 1 a subpoena or administrative summons will be required from any government or law enforcement agency or legislative committee seeking the record, Edward G. Greber, AT&T's vice president for customer service, said.

He also announced that the customers will be notified of the subpoena or summons, except in what he called special cases.

AT&T said the exception will be used where the agency requesting the records directs the company not to disclose, certifying that such notification would impede its investigation and interfere with law enforcement.

The exception brought a response from the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press that AT&T's plan is "not satisfactory." It added that some members of the committee commended AT&T's plan to require a subpoena or summons.

"The committee has been seeking a guarantee that any journalist whose toll call records have been demanded by any government agency or official be given a chance to challenge such demand by appropriate court action," the committee's statement said.

"The AT&T release states that the telephone company will not give notification in cases where the government agency certifies that such notification could impede its investigation. This qualification potentially nullifies the telephone company's entire commitment to provide advance notice."

Also, the committee said there is nothing to indicate AT&T will "delay honoring the subpoena until after the journalists have had an opportunity to go to court and require the government agency involved to demonstrate the legal basis for the subpoena."

Earlier, the committee had threatened to sue AT&T to require the company to notify journalists and news organizations of any such subpoenas.

Associated Press