# CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

The cost of Eavesdropping

In the world of spy agencies, the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) is the largest, most secret, most technologically advanced intelligence agency in the world. The NSA works in congruent with Canada's Communications Security Establishment (CSE), Great Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), Australia's Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) and New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB). Together these agencies spend trillions of dollars on the latest and most advanced eavesdropping technology, as well as employ tens of thousands of analysts, mathematicians, linguists, code-makers and code-breakers. Their mission, is the monitoring of foreign and domestic communications, whether it's telephone conversations, emails, faxes, texts, instant messages, chat groups and even social networking sites like Facebook. These activities are conducted in the hopes that the plans of terrorists and foreign spies can be foiled before any harm can be done to the U.S. or its allies. The NSA headquarters located on the grounds of Fort Meade, Maryland, employs somewhere between 25 000 and over 35 000 personnel, and is believed to house the second most powerful supercomputer in the world.

What if the average citizen, like the NSA, had the ability to listen in on telephone conversations, intercept text messages, and listen to conversations in a room half way around the world? What if, instead of costing trillions of dollars for this technology it only cost a few hundred? Does this sound like Hollywood fiction?

## Introducing Spy Phone Technology

A few short years ago, this technology was only known to mainly law enforcement and private sector investigators. However in the past year alone, the prevalence of this technology has exploded into the mainstream private sector due to internet entrepreneurs and computer programmers. These individuals have been capitalizing on the enormous monetary payout by selling a powerful tool that once created, costs nothing to reproduce.

## So How Does It Work?

The software must first be installed on the target or victim's phone. This can be done in one of two ways: once in his or her possession, the phone can be directed to a secure site where the software is downloaded and installed locally in under 15 minutes. The other option is to have the program installed remotely via text message. Once the unsuspecting victim opens what seems to be a harmless text message, the software installs itself in stealth mode. In either case, once installed, the eavesdropper can actively monitor all incoming and outgoing calls, read all text messages, and listen in to any ambient conversations by remotely activating the microphone at any time. Some programs even offer the possibility of tracking and pinpointing the victim's location via the phone's GPS feature.

## Who Uses This Software?

Almost anyone, from the suspicious spouse, business competitor conducting corporate espionage, jealous ex-boyfriend, or parents wanting to keep tabs on their unruly teenager, have purchased and used this product. The spy software also works on the most recent phones including Blackberry and iPhone.

### How Do I Protect Myself?

There are basic steps you can take that will dramatically drop your chances of falling victim.

1. Never leave your phone unattended. It only takes a few minutes for someone to install the software on your phone.

2. Don't allow others to make phone calls from your phone. If you do, make sure they never leave your sight. Remember, most often the person installing the spy software on your phone is not some shady character wearing a black trench coat, but can usually be someone very close to you.

3. If your phone has a feature to automatically password protected it during any inactivity, enable it!

4. With Christmas a few days away, be cautious of those bearing gifts of gold, frankincense & free cell phones. The phone could be pre-programmed with the spy software.

5. Keep current with your phone's security updates and firmware.

## Am I A Victim?

Terry Cutler of terrycutler.com is, a Certified Ethical Hacker based in Montreal, Canada, he states that most people will not be able to verify if their phone has been infected. The only effective solution is prevention, and if you suspect that your phone may have been compromised, having the phone completely erased and reset may be your only recourse.

## Where's the Harm in Checking up On Your Daughter, Wife or Boyfriend?

In this day and age where trust and confidence are hard to come by, many debate the moral and ethical issues surrounding this product. Notions of "if my boyfriend isn't doing anything wrong then he has nothing to worry about" may justify the use of these programs to alleviate insecurities. But the fact remains that eavesdropping on your spouses' private telephone conversation should still be considered a serious invasion of privacy. Not to mention that if a cell phone virus can resolve people's trust issues, Dr. Phil will soon be out of a job.

## Isn't It Illegal?

Aside from the moral and ethical issues there is the legal aspect. The full legal ramifications are not quite clear, since the popularity of this new spy software is fairly recent. Similar to much of the spy equipment products sold on the internet, it is not illegal for someone to buy or sell the software. The legal issue

only comes into play in how the product is used; such as surreptitiously monitoring a person's conversations without their consent.

I presume that before the popularity of this software reaches the point where one can easily procure a copy at their local Walmart, law enforcement agencies worldwide will begin to crack down on many of the developers of these programs, and attempt to limit the exposure and proliferation of such products. For now, keep an eye on your mobile, because you never know if Big (or Little) brother may be listening in.

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**About the author**

John Farinaccio has over 15 years experience in investigations, surveillance and intelligence gathering. Founder and acting Director of The Canadian Private Investigators' Resource Centre (C.P.I.R.C.) since 1999, creating the largest network of investigators in Canada. Over the years John has supervised several investigation, undercover and surveillance teams, as well as spearheaded several advance reconnaissance teams for protection details world-wide, many in hostile zones.

John has been called on by the media conducting several interviews as an expert in the field of private sector investigations.