



How to tell if your telephone may be tapped

By Robert Ing, DSc, FAPSc, CPO

We live in a world where technology is so inexpensive and plentiful that anyone with a hundred dollars can easily afford the very basic equipment to tap into your hardwired telephone line and monitor your calls. Of course, they would eventually be discovered and unless they have a real life, may find themselves huddled over hours of your recorded conversations listening to you order groceries, pizza, be stuck on hold waiting for customer service and other exciting aspects of your life on the telephone. For the average person, the probability of being targeted by someone wishing to spend the money and time to tap their telephone is simply not an investment that would yield a good return, unless of course it is strictly for a personal motive (ie. alleged cheating partner). While some may reasonably argue that financial account information over the telephone may offer some incentive for tapping, the amount of effort to tap into each line for this purpose is not worth the effort when there are so many other ways to snag massive amounts of personal account data from unprotected personal computers, websites and several other sources.

So, if you have an average lifestyle, chances are the only reasons your telephone may be tapped is if your partner suspects you are cheating on them, you are being investigated by law enforcement / government or by corporate internal (private) security. However, if you are a public figure, in a competitive industry or in a high-level corporate or government position you may be at risk.

The most important thing is not to be paranoid. I wrote this article to save the potentially paranoid from companies and individuals who play on this paranoia while they separate people from hundreds to thousands of dollars in the search for non-existent bugs and threats. I also wrote this article to help those who may have a legitimate risk to identify it.

Take this survey to find out if you have a possible risk of your telephone being tapped.

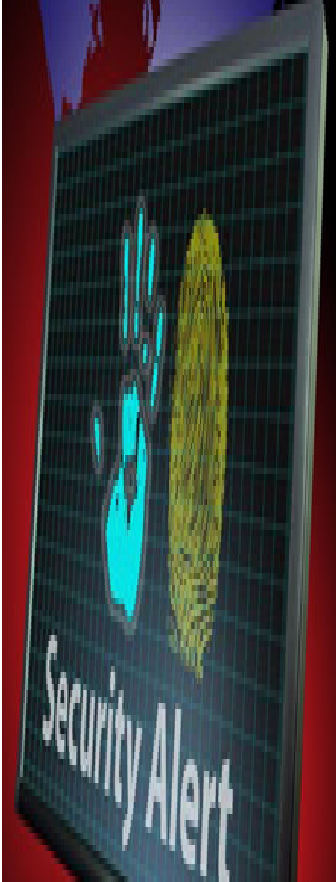
Listed below is a checklist of items that require you to answer "Yes" or "No". When answering, carefully think about the item before committing your answer.

- 1) Do you work with confidential or sensitive material more than 50% of the time?
- 2) Are you in a high profile or controversial position within your profession, industry or the public?

Dr. Robert Ing is a forensic scientist, broadcaster and author. An internationally acclaimed forensic intelligence specialist, he has traveled the world on behalf of the interests of governments and major corporations. Dr. Ing has appeared on major North American broadcast news networks on the issues of forensic intelligence, espionage risk management, privacy, identity theft, electronic surveillance and Internet crime.

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- 3) Do people appear to know details about you or your business that they would not have ordinarily been privy to?
- 4) Does information concerning your business or personal activities get leaked to competitors, associates or the public?
- 5) Do you notice unusual sounds or volume changes on your telephone line?
- 6) Do you hear static, popping or scratching noises on your telephone?
- 7) Do sounds come from your telephone handset when it is on the hook?
- 8) Does your telephone often only ring once, or you hear a very faint tone, pitch or beep during a conversation?
- 9) Does your radio or television encounter strange interference or where a station should be there is just dead silence on the radio or a blank screen on the television when you use your hardwired telephone?
- 10) Was your house broken into but nothing was taken?
- 11) Do telephone wall plates seem to have been moved or are excessively dirty or excessively clean?
- 12) Is there loose dry-wall dust or plaster on the floor next to a telephone wall plate?
- 13) Does the majority of your work involve research and development, intellectual property development or the creation of new concepts or designs?
- 14) If you own your own business, should detailed information regarding the finance, marketing, pricing or operations of your business become available to a competitor or the public, would your business be at a disadvantage?
- 15) If detailed information regarding your personal finances or private life were made available to outsiders, would this have an impact?
- 16) Have you found that some of your voicemails have been marked "read" or been deleted even though you have not "read" or deleted these messages?



17) Does the call display on wired telephone indicate more than one call weekly from area code "000" or "999", or a call that displays all information lines as "----" yet your telephone has not rung during this time period?

18) Are you, your company or organization involved in sensitive business, contract or labour negotiations?

19) Are you involved in an emotionally charged or abusive separation, divorce, have a suspicious partner or personal partnership termination?

If you answered "yes" to four questions or more you may have reasonable grounds to have your home and office telephone professionally checked for a tap and an audit for other surveillance devices.

Should you do decide to call in a professional; call from a different telephone, ensure the company offering the service has accredited/verifiable references in both security and electronics (a must), and most of all realize that the cost of a professional surveillance audit ranges from the high hundreds to thousands of dollars. If anyone offers to do this for a couple hundred dollars and shows up with one piece of test equipment, it is highly likely that you could do a better job yourself with the same piece of test equipment purchased off the Internet! You pay for what you get and real TSCM specialists come with at least two test instruments, verifiable electronics experience and will spend at least a couple of hours performing an electronic security audit.

About the Author

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