

Who Has Access to your Cell Phone? That Answer May Surprise You.

September 20, 2011 – If you think that just because your cell phone is in your possession, nobody else could possibly have access to the data on it, you’d be wrong. But what might surprise you is that it isn’t just hackers that can gain access to your data. It could actually be you spouse, or even a co-worker who is spying on you without your knowledge. Moreover, it is surprisingly simple for anyone you know gain access to everything you do on your cell phone in near real time. And while the act of gathering all of that information may actually be illegal, the software needed for spying can be purchased completely legally, right over the internet.

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
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})();
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I actually became aware of this issue this past weekend while taking a short flight. I was thumbing through SkyMall’s catalogue when I ran across an advertisement for something called Cell Phone Spy. Much to my chagrin, the advertisement advocates spying on your spouse (they actually misspelled the word as ‘œspuse’; something my wife and I both got a big laugh out of), children and other ‘œloved ones’. I’ll digress a little here, but if you feel the need to spy on ‘œloved ones’ and they find out, you may find yourself excluded from that little club for the rest of your life. Back to the story

When I arrived back home, I decided to take a look at the product being offered. What I found was that this particular product was mild in comparison to the features available in some other products. One product, called Cell Phone Recon, provides remote monitoring of cell phones in real time. That means that while you are using your phone, someone else can be sitting at their computer and see what you are doing immediately.

They can see all of your outgoing and incoming calls. They can see the text messages you send and receive, and who you are communicating with. They can get your GPS location and copy your phone book. And if you are using a Blackberry, they can even read your e-mail messages. Some similar products can even retrieve already deleted text

messages.

According to the product's web page, Cell Phone Recon runs in background and is "covert". In other words, finding out if it is installed on your phone could be very difficult.

It does need to be pointed out that there are legitimate applications for this type of software. Very specifically, if your employer issues you a cell phone, and your employer has a computing policy, there is a good chance that the policy states both the appropriate uses for your phone and that any communication over the phone is the property of the company. Put another way, you should have no expectation of privacy.

But other than your employer, or a government agency with a search warrant, this software certainly exceeds the legal limits of a wide variety of state and federal privacy laws. But that probably won't stop some people from using it to spy on their children or suspected cheating spouse. And it certainly won't stop anyone who is intent upon breaking the law in the first place. The GPS tracking ability could be downright frightening for anyone who has had an issue with stalking.

The best way to prevent having a problem with this type of application is to make sure that you don't store information on your phone that you don't want anyone else to see. But that may be easier said than done because while you can control the information you place on your phone, you have very little control over information that other people send to you.

Because of this, it is a good idea to lock down your phone with a password. Most phones will allow this but very few people take advantage of the capability. Password protecting your phone will make it impossible for someone to use your phone if it is stolen, unless they are able to gain access to your password. Depending upon the phone model, it will also make it impossible for someone to install an application on your phone without your knowledge. Just make sure your password is not something that other members or your family, co-workers or friends can easily guess.

by Jim Malmberg

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