

SPRINT'S 50 MILLION CUSTOMERS HAVE BEEN GEO-TRACKED 8 MILLION TIMES-IN THE LAST YEAR

Chris Soghoian caught a remarkable admission at a surveillance conference in October. Sprint's Manager of Electronic Surveillance revealed that law enforcement has used Sprint's geotracking function 8 million times in the thirteen months prior to his comment.

Sprint Nextel provided law enforcement agencies with its customers' (GPS) location information over 8 million times between September 2008 and October 2009. This massive disclosure of sensitive customer information was made possible due to the roll-out by Sprint of a new, special web portal for law enforcement officers.

The evidence documenting this surveillance program comes in the form of an audio recording of Sprint's Manager of Electronic Surveillance, who described it during a panel discussion at a wiretapping and interception industry conference, held in Washington DC in October of 2009.

[snip]

[M]y major concern is the volume of requests. We have a lot of things that are automated but that's just scratching the surface. One of the things, like with our GPS tool. We turned it on the web interface for law enforcement about one year ago last month, and we just passed 8 million requests. So there is no way on earth my team could have handled

8 million requests from law enforcement, just for GPS alone. So the tool has just really caught on fire with law enforcement. They also love that it is extremely inexpensive to operate and easy, so, just the sheer volume of requests they anticipate us automating other features, and I just don't know how we'll handle the millions and millions of requests that are going to come in.

Now, as he documents in extensive detail, using cell phone location to get the geolocation of someone is just one of a number of uses of legal surveillance techniques that is eluding public reporting.

But that's by design. Even assuming many of these uses of Sprint's geo-tracking capabilities are multiple requests for the same person, there are a whole lot of people whose physical location is being tracked.

Probably a bunch of people who bought acetone and hydrogen peroxide for home improvement uses.

Anyway, click through for a bunch more numbers and discussion, as well as MP3s of this admission.