

Posted May 5, 2008 by  [David Silverberg](#)

U.S. Wiretaps, Secret Warrants On the Rise

A new report says U.S. wiretaps were up 20 per cent in 2007 over the year before. The intercepts were mainly used for drug cases. And secret warrants have doubled since 9/11, compelling Americans to wonder if they're living in a surveillance society.

Digital Journal — Wiretaps in the U.S. have increased 20 per cent in 2007 over the year before, with the majority of this eavesdropping occurring on portable devices. According to a release from the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, 81 per cent of all 2007 wiretaps were used for drug-related cases. Also, the Justice Department said the amount of approved secret warrants more than doubled since 9/11.


[The 2007 Wiretap Report](#) revealed 2,208 wiretaps were requested last year, an increase from 1,839 in 2006. No application was denied. The PDF report breaks down how wiretaps were carried out and the major offenses where the intercepts were most prevalent. The report said 94 per cent of last year's wiretaps were for devices such as digital pagers and portable phones. The other noticeable trend? Eight-one per cent of all wiretaps related to drug crimes, with murder and assault coming in a very distant second (6 per cent).

State and federal authorities are also enjoying lowering prices to buy wiretaps. The cost per intercept has been plummeting since 2003, when it peaked at just over \$62,000. In 2007, that cost had fallen to \$48,477 per investigation. While the intercept cost may sound expensive, the report noted the wiretaps were used to make massive drug busts, often leading to the arrest of dozens of drug smugglers.

The Wiretap Report provides insight into the warrants we know about. Last week, the Justice Department reported that the number of secret warrants used in counterterrorism doubled since the attacks of 9/11. In 2007, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) approved 2,370 such requests, compared to 1,012 in 2000.

The ACLU isn't happy with the increase of these warrants, saying in a [statement](#):

The ever-increasing reach of government surveillance should be disturbing to anyone committed to constitutional values. Pervasive surveillance, besides eroding the right to privacy, deters innocent people from participating in the political process and from


 Vote it up!

exercising their freedoms of speech, association, and religion.

Despite the rise of secret warrants, the White House is [apparently softening its stance](#) in updating the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. A bill approved by House Democrats in March 2008 went a long way to block the immunity President George W. Bush demanded for telecom companies to facilitate a warrantless wiretap program.

The National Security Agency has been known to conduct secret [wiretapping](#) programs affecting customers of AT&T, among other telecom firms. Supposedly, the NSA project tracks communication only between foreign callers and callers in the U.S.