

AT&T's NSA legal woes continue to grow

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AT&T has flatly denied the allegations, but the telecommunications giant continues to be mired by reports that it and other major carriers have gone out of their way to cooperate with the U.S. government to provide information on calls made in the United States.

What's more, technology-focused publication Wired News reported Monday that it had documents assembled by a former employee of the company that prove how AT&T has gone about monitoring Internet traffic and providing the information to the National Security Agency.

Mark Klein, a former technician at AT&T, said that "in 2003, AT&T built 'secret rooms' hidden deep in the bowels of its central offices in

various cities, housing computer gear for a government spy operation which taps into the company's popular WorldNet service and the entire internet. These installations enable the government to look at every individual message on the Internet and analyze exactly what people are doing. Documents showing the hardwire installation in San Francisco suggest that there are similar locations being installed in numerous other cities."

He added that "the spying program is vastly bigger and was directly authorized by President Bush, as he himself has now admitted, in flagrant violation of specific statutes and constitutional protections for civil liberties. I am presenting this information to facilitate the dismantling of this dangerous Orwellian project."

Klein provides three internal company documents to back up his case, including a manual from December 2002, all of which had previously been under seal in the federal court of San Francisco, and he is one of the key witnesses for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a non-profit group that advocates for digital rights that filed a lawsuit against the company as early as this January. The foundation has charged AT&T with "collaborating with the National Security Agency in its massive and illegal program to wiretap and data-mine Americans' communications."

In total, Wired published 30 pages of documentation provided by Klein, but so far there has been no evidence that would support the former technician's claims or indeed prove whether the documents that he provided are indeed what they claim to be. For its part, AT&T issued a statement May 11 that suggested that while it would comply with the law, it would not go out of its way to cooperate with the authorities and sacrifice the privacy of its customers.

"We prize the trust our customers place in us. If and when AT&T is asked to help, we do so strictly within the law and under the most

stringent conditions," AT&T stated.

Similar statements were issued by the two other major carriers, BellSouth and Verizon, about a week after USA Today reported that the three companies have been cooperating with the NSA, even though the agency never provided them with a warrant. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, meanwhile, has so far filed a lawsuit only against AT&T.

For its part, AT&T is seeing the legal charges against it continue to increase. Most recently, the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois filed suit Monday against the company for providing phone records of Illinois customers without a court order to the government.

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