

Use of cellphone trackers in criminal probes under review in US

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The US Justice Department said Monday it is re-examining its controversial use of secret cellphone tracking devices to establish the location of suspects in criminal investigations, a spokesman said.

"With regard to this particular technology, the Department of Justice is in the process of examining its policies to ensure they reflect the department's continuing commitment to conducting its vital missions while according appropriate respect for privacy and civil liberties," Justice Department spokesman Patrick Rodenbush said.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the FBI in recent months has begun getting [search warrants](#) from judges to use the tracking devices, contrary to their previous practice.

Some versions of the devices are deployed on aircraft and scan data from thousands of phones by Americans not under investigation, according to the Journal.

They are used by the FBI, the US Marshals Service and the Drug Enforcement Administration—although each have their own procedures for using them.

The review comes amid growing concern among Americans over monitoring of their emails, texts or cellphone conversations, according to a study last year by the Pew Research Center.

The National Security Agency and its British counterpart are reportedly capable of secretly tracking millions of cellphone conversations around the world by hacking encrypted SIM cards.

The US Supreme Court ruled last June, however, that obtaining the contents of cellphones without warrants is "generally" unconstitutional.

"The fact that technology now allows an individual to carry such information in his hand does not make the information any less worthy of the protection for which the founders fought," wrote Chief Justice John Roberts.

"Our answer to the question of what police must do before searching a cellphone seized incident to an arrest is accordingly simple—get a warrant," he wrote.

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