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5 Terrifying Ways Your Own Gadgets Can Be Used to Spy On You

By [Mark Hill](#) May 23, 2010 1,028,478 views

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Thanks to the Bush administration and one Will Smith movie, we all have a fairly justifiable fear of government surveillance. But it turns out you should be just as paranoid about your boss, your overly affectionate uncle and that stuttering blinky guy who lingers by your garbage cans on trash days. Because thanks to modern technology, the details of your life are openly accessible to pretty much anybody who wants them.

#5. Tracking Your Movements



Imagine it's Saturday night and you're doing your usual Saturday night thing, when your webcam secretly clicks on. And somewhere, somebody starts watching you while you wipe Dorito dusted fingers on your whitey tighties and bob your head to Nickelback. They could be secretly uploading videos of you on to YouTube, taking notes for anthropological purposes or, if you're lucky, masturbating.

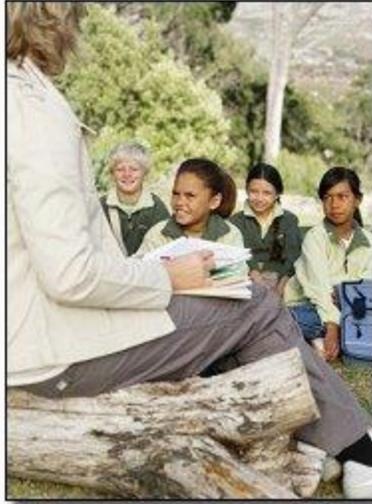


And you'd never even know they're there.

Wait, What?

By now you've almost certainly heard about that [high school in Pennsylvania](#) that got in trouble for issuing its students laptops, and then spying on them in their bedrooms, remotely, by controlling their webcams.

We're going to bet that, before that story broke, you didn't know there was even such a thing as turning on somebody else's webcam against their will from across town. And maybe you thought the school had done some weird modification to the laptops, and that it was just an isolated incident by a somewhat insane school district.



Class outside? What the fuck is going on here?

The truth is, it took basically no effort on their part. All sorts of [programs](#) are available to let you remotely commandeer a webcam, and many of them are free. Simple versions will just take photos or videos when they detect movement, but more complex software will send you an e-mail when the computer you've installed the program on is in use, so you can immediately login and control the webcam without the hassle of having to stare at an empty room until the person you're stalking shows up. Convenient!



Leaving creeps free time to work on their Harry Potter/Starfox slash fiction.

One of the creepier uses of this technology [came back in 2008](#), when a University of Florida student, who was known for helpfully fixing the computer problems of strangers, not so helpfully installed programs onto some of the computers he repaired so he could use the webcam to capture nude pictures of the girls who owned them.

This is a sad example of what would be hilarious in a wacky college movie being disturbing in real life, and we also have to wonder how someone that proficient with computers was unaware you could find plenty of naked women on the Internet in roughly three seconds.

#4. Tracking Your Movements



Let's say that like most Cracked readers during this recession, you're a custodian. And your boss gives you a cool cell phone with a clippy thing that you attach to your waist while you're working, which you assume is so he can phone you when there's some macaroni vomit you've got to take care of. What you wouldn't assume is that he's using that cool cell phone to track and log your every custodiony movement.



9:35 a.m. - Retreated into "janitor's lounge."

For some companies, it's not enough to know what sleazy shit you're totally into on the Internet. What they really want to know is what sleazy shit you're into at the workplace. For these guys, the logical next step in employee surveillance is using GPS technology to track your every move while you're on the job.

Wait, What?

Japanese company KDDI has [developed technology](#) for cell phones that uses something called [accelerometers](#) to track precise movements, then beams all that info back to a central location. And we're not throwing the word "precise" around willy-nilly here. These guys can tell if whoever wearing the phone is sweeping versus scrubbing, walking versus running, doing number two in the bathroom versus doing number two in the secretary's filing cabinet. It's *that* sophisticated.



And **anyone** with access to your phone can secretly upload the software. Your mom. Your girlfriend. A grudge-holding, time-traveling Alexander Graham Bell... anyone.



For those of you who think that this would never be used in America, it sort of already is, just in a simpler form. Called [geofencing](#), it's used by businesses whose employees are constantly on the move, like FedEx drivers. A GPS enabled cell phone with some software installed on it lets bosses know where their drivers are at all times, and

they'll get e-mail alerts if their employees are speeding, loitering or entering "prohibited areas," like a bar, or cockfighting arenas, or their home, or whatever they feel like labeling as prohibited.



"Get back to work. Those pizzas aren't going to deliver themselves."

But, hey, it's not like they're listening in on your calls or anything...

#3. Listening to Your Phone Calls



If you told us 20 years ago that there would be places where cell phones would be [more ubiquitous than toilets](#), we would have shat our Girbauds and done a spit-take into your mirrored Oakleys. But here we are, in 2010, with just about every schmo carting a cell phone around like it's no big thing. Hey! You know what else is "no big thing"? Using that same ubiquitous device to to listen to your conversations, read your text messages and monitor your online browsing.



Wait, What?

Companies like [Mobile Spy](#) are on the cutting edge of the turning cell phones into secret, psycho nanny devices business. For just about \$100, customers can get software that records the phone number and length of every outgoing and incoming call, all text messages sent and received, and the phone's Internet browsing history. All of that info then gets sent to a database run by the good people behind Mobile Spy, and can be perused by users at their leisure.



"Don't worry, everybody. She said she'd be right back."

[Fancier programs](#) also let you listen in on and record live phone conversations.

Now, this doesn't mean you should get all paranoid and start sending all your text messages in Esperanto, but the fact that so many different kinds of software for spying on cell phones exist suggests that there's a pretty serious market for this sort of thing.

On the plus side, none of these programs can be used unless the perpetrator has access to your phone. On the down side, anyone who *does* have access to your phone can monitor you like you're a dissatisfied Soviet dissident and they're the KGB.



But no untrustworthy person will ever be alone with your phone, right?