

3/4/89

A push for an additional feature on cellular car phones: Privacy

By Hal Spencer
Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — As you cruise down the highway and chat on your cellular telephone with your sweetheart, lawyer, bookie or broker, bear in mind that somebody — anybody — could be listening.

The fact that conversations on cellular telephones can easily be pulled from the airwaves with inexpensive radio scanners upsets a lot of people, including a few state legislators who have proposed a measure to make such eavesdropping illegal.

At a hearing here this week by the legislative Committee on Energy and Utilities, one cellular-phone user urged action.

"If there's no prohibition against listening in, why not just go to a CB?" asked lobbyist Steve Duncan. "The point for me is that my phone is not like a CB radio. I'm paying more to the phone company to use my car phone than to use a phone at my home."

Duncan says he pays \$150 a month in subscriber charges for his car phone.

Lawyer Deborah Senn, a legislative researcher, said that either technology must solve the problem or lawmakers must address it. She said the problem would only grow along with the popularity of cellular car phones, now estimated to number one million in the United States.

Duncan acknowledged that a state law might not stop eavesdroppers, especially since a 1986 federal law, which carries a \$500 fine for eavesdropping, seems to have had little effect.

But he said at least "bragging rights would stop" among eavesdroppers who have been known to tape conversations and play them on commercial radio stations for entertainment. He said he had heard such a program recently on a Seattle station.

Tom McBride, another legislative researcher, said the cellular phone industry was working on relatively affordable technology to scramble conversations.