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COURT-OKD WIRETAPS UP 18.2% LAST YEAR
U.S. REPORT SHOWS NONE APPROVED BY ILLINOIS JUDGES

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Federal and state court judges approved 1,154 wiretap applications in 1994, marking an 18.2 percent hike from the previous year, according to federal court officials.

While the number of authorized wiretaps jumped for the third consecutive year, the average cost of a wiretap in which the costs were reported during 1994 fell to \$49,478, according to the Administrative Office of the U.S. Court's "Report on Applications for Orders Authorizing or Approving the Interception of Wire, Oral or Electronic Communications," also called the "Wiretap Report," filed yearly with Congress. The average cost of a wiretap reported in 1993 was \$57,256, representing a 10-year high.

The total wiretap authorizations for calendar year 1994 included 600 applications approved by state court judges and 554 by federal jurists, according to the report submitted to Congress in late April, and released recently.

Federal judges in the Northern District of Illinois reported the authorization of 20 wiretap applications during 1994, including 16 for narcotics investigations, two for corruption probes and one each for racketeering and firearms offenses, the report said. A total of 15 authorized applications were reported approved by Northern District judges in 1993.

"We are no different than other communities where there is an increase in violent organized drug activity," Randall Samborn, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Chicago, said Friday. "And in those cases where it's difficult to get witnesses to cooperate out of fear, wiretaps are not only the investigative tool of last resort, they often provide the most credible evidence."

Marc W. Martin, a local criminal defense lawyer, said Friday he wasn't surprised by the report of increased use of wiretaps in local federal investigations. "My experience has been that

[federal authorities] are using wiretaps in more and more routine drug cases," he added.

"I'm surprised that the records reflect only 20 wiretaps, but I have absolutely no basis to contest that," said Thomas M. Breen, a defense attorney with Martin, Breen & Merrick. "To me, that's kind of low."

For at least the second straight year, no applications were reported or authorized by state court judges in Illinois during 1994, the report said.

"The fact that there were none [reported in Illinois] state courts surprises me," added Martin of Genson, Steinback, Gillespie & Martin. "That sounds wrong."

Nationally, the largest number of intercept application authorizations last year -- 876 -- came in narcotics matters, up from 679 in 1993, the report showed. Racketeering offenses were targeted in 88 of the authorizations last year, with 86 in extortion investigations.

Of the 2,852 people arrested by the end of 1994 resulting from electronic surveillance activity, 772 were convicted, the report said.

No intercept applications were denied for six consecutive years, including 1994, the report reflected. Judges denied seven applications from 1984-88.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ---

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