

# Suspicious of your partner? Bug them

No bedroom or boardroom is safe from snooping devices

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IT is getting easier and cheaper to spy on your partner or business rival these days.

For as little as R280, a suspicious husband or wife — or a deceitful businessman — can buy a listening device online. For a bit extra, there are also clocks, sunglasses and alarm system “eyes” with built-in clandestine cameras.

Security experts and detective agencies said this week that there was massive growth in this market, with clients asking for these gadgets.

“We have quite a few people phoning us about matrimonial cases,” said Alan Carey, director of Durban-based Justicia Investigations. “A lot of times, when we speak to them, they say that they have these suspicions because they had already bought and used a particular device.”

Increasingly common are small electronic devices that are activated re-

motely. A SIM card is inserted into the device and, when that number is dialled, the person calling can listen to what is being said nearby. Carey said this was used as much in matrimonial cases as in industrial espionage.

“One [client] actually took out the top wooden panel of the door of a flat he owned in Joburg that his wife was going up to and placed the device there. He then dialled in and listened in to a conversation and realised that his wife wasn’t alone in the flat. He came to us, said his wife was going back to Joburg and asked if we could go and do surveillance,” said Carey.

These kinds of devices are available across South Africa, not only in online stores.

Manhar Parshotam, owner of Dragon Protection Services, said: “You can get them pretty much anywhere these days.”

They were usually used when cheating was suspected. “We see them used for incidents involving husbands and wives, that’s the most common. But you also see people do it for business reasons, such as recording their business partners if the relationship has soured. People are also doing it in meetings,” said Parshotam.

Space Television, an electronics store in Durban, stocks these and more sophisticated devices. Among them are an alarm clock with a motion-sensing camera for R1 800, a wireless alarm system “eye” with a high-definition camera for R2 300, and even a replica car key with a microphone and camera. The key costs just over R1 000 and salesman Khulekani Dlamini said it was usually used to secretly record business meetings.

Arguably the most advanced device is a pair of sunglasses with a camera

built into the frame. While this is largely used for recreation, particularly by cyclists wanting to record their ride, it is also used for clandestine recording. The glasses cost R1 755.

Dlamini said most of the customers who wanted these products suspected their domestic workers of stealing from them.

“But there are people who come and say straight out that they think their partner is up to something,” he said.

Carey was particularly concerned, however, at how such devices were being used for in-

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dustrial espionage.



“If you know a meeting is taking place in a boardroom at, say, 10am tomorrow, you could buy the device, get some doublesided tape and stick it under the table. Then all you have to do is dial in and you would be able to listen in. It’s that easy.”

Carey’s company has reported an increase in calls from big businesses asking to sweep their offices for bugging devices.

“In the first three or four months of the year we received on average two or three calls a week. In the past, if we did one or two debugs a month, that was a lot,” said Carey.

But Dave Miller, of Sleuth Investigative Services, said these low-cost devices were unreliable and the batteries did not last more than a few hours. “Most say they are reliable, but they’re not. Some stuff . . . is ineffective, cheap junk.”

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