

# Mobile phone snooper scam

By Christopher Laske and Daniel Foggo

A MAJOR security flaw in Britain's mobile phone system can be exposed today.

A special investigation by The Mail on Sunday reveals how millions of mobile users could, without their knowledge, have their private voice mail messages accessed by strangers.

The reason the message systems are vulnerable to eavesdropping is that all major BT Cellnet and Vodafone mobile systems are given the same four-digit access code.

The flaw is an individual user's to input a new code. The vast majority of phone owners fail to do so - almost always. The Mail on Sunday has discovered because they are simply unaware that such action is necessary.

However, growing numbers of fraudsters, crooks and stalkers do know the secret. And it enables them to get access to private and sensitive mobile messages of celebrities, their agents and television targets.

All subscribers are vulnerable, including Cabinet Ministers, MPs, VPs, businessmen and showbusiness personalities.

It was only after discovering how easy it is to be bugged by predators trying to get advance information about share deals and mergers.

A team of Mail on Sunday investigators accessed the private messages of 12 MPs within seconds. They thanked us for alerting them to the problem, and asked calls for better warnings to be given by phone companies.

One Cabinet Minister whose messages were intercepted was David Blunkett, the Home Secretary. The result is a very serious warning: if you don't change your code, you could be eavesdropped on by anyone.

I am surprised to hear anyone could have intercepted messages like this unless...

## Millions of users could be affected

...that is, unless you change your code. You should change your code if you have a mobile phone. The reason is that all mobile phone systems are given the same four-digit access code.

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## A Mail on Sunday investigation reveals how stalkers and fraudsters can hear your private voice mail... and even those of Cabinet Ministers

because subscribers are not given a universal default code. They have to call a number and key in their own code in order to access the message system.

But for users of the two biggest networks, the security implications are startling.

Our investigation began after we were contacted by a concerned City businessman who has worked for major merchant banks for more than 25 years.

The businessman, who has asked for anonymity, told how he had been alerted to a security breach by a contact, and was told that a letter, which he received, had been intercepted and read by someone.

He said that the letter had been intercepted and read by someone, and that the person who intercepted it was a stranger.

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## Stars who had no idea of the risks

WE ASKED a team of reporters to call the rich and the famous in order to test properly the flaws in the mobile phone system.

Out of 32 numbers called, we accessed the mobile message systems of 12 people.

In every case, we ended the call before the messages actually played.

Those whose message systems were accessed were yachtswoman Tracy Edwards, actor Shaun Scott, from The Bill, PR guru Lord Bell, author Edwin Currie, Education Secretary David Blunkett, Employment Minister Teess Jowell and MP Gerald Kaufman.

Tracy Edwards said: 'Oh, my God, I never knew.'

'I am very surprised at the news. They don't tell you, do they? But it certainly makes sense to change your code.'

Shaun Scott, who plays DI Chris Deakin in The Bill, said: 'I had no idea that anyone could listen into my messages by just changing a simple code.'

'But I suppose in this high-tech electronic age, anything is possible. I will certainly be changing the pin code.'

Lord Bell, who had no messages, said: 'Nobody ever leaves sensitive messages on my phone. If they did, I would use a different system.'

Former Tory Minister and best-selling author Edwin Currie had four messages.

Though it would be unwise to think the access codes on other people's message systems could not be accessed.

**STUNNED:** Yachtswoman Tracy Edwards was one of 12 members of the list



TAPPED: The Bill actor Shaun Scott

people can get into it. You would think that the first thing a celebrity would do would be to change the code, but many people don't bother.

small could be endangered, or that the details of our lives could be divulged.

The message service is not a secure one. It can also be accessed by anyone who has access to the system.

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instructions on how to change access codes in its customer booklets.

A spokesman said that instructions on how to use the message system were included in the standard issue booklet How To

## People should read the small print

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literature to send to subscribers, admitted that the booklet on its Retail message service is not always included and needs to be expressly requested.

One added: 'We have had complaints from people who had their mailboxes accessed and the messages obtained by other people.'

A spokeswoman for telephone network Ofcom said that this may be something that needs to be looked at.

'If companies are not providing