

THE DAILY CALLER

‘SCANDALOUS’: Baltimore Police Spying On Cellphones And Hiding It

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A detective’s court testimony Monday revealed that Baltimore law enforcement is spying on residents at an incredible rate without a warrant — and doing their best to hide it.

Detective Michael Dressel testified that Baltimore law enforcement have used “sting rays”— devices that can track personal cell phone data and location—without court orders, [The Baltimore Sun reports](#). Police [said](#) they have used sting rays 4,300 more than times since 2007.

“This is scandalous,” Tim Lynch, the Cato Institute’s Director for the Project on Criminal Justice, told The Daily Caller News Foundation. “Police agencies have misled the public about how the stingray devices have been used and how often. We need to find out what has been happening in other cities around the country. FBI officials and police chiefs need to come clean about this.”

The testimony came in a murder case where law enforcement used sting rays to find a phone involved in the alleged murder. Sting rays are devices used by authorities that [act like cell phone towers](#), intercepting cell phone signals that would normally go to cellular towers. This allows authorities to track where you are, usually without a warrant and often even without a court order. Some sting rays can even detect information about your texts, calls and emails.

Local police departments obtain these devices from federal agencies but only on the condition that they keep the entire project entirely hidden from the public. In fact, police often [drop charges](#) or [offer plea bargains](#) in cases related to sting rays when pressured by defense lawyers or judges to reveal how they work.

[In one Florida case](#), prosecutors who had what seemed an open and shut robbery case offered the defendant a plea bargain when pressured on police’s use of sting rays.

They would rather drop the charge than expose the practice. Because of this, how the devices work and how often they are used is one of law enforcement’s best kept secrets.

This latest report in Baltimore is important not just because it reveals how hidden the use of stingrays is, but also because since we know so little about the practice, any tidbit of information is an important window into this widely used and little understood surveillance technology.