Chapter I

Workplace Surveillance

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Abstract

This chapter identifies factors that are encouraging the growth in the monitoring of employees at work and investigates the reasons for this growth. Technologies, both old and new, that are available for use in monitoring workers are described, and the advantages in the deployment of some of these technologies are compared. The various effects of monitoring on employees are considered, along with ways by which employees can protect themselves from undesirable effects.

Introduction

Substantial developments in workplace technology over the past two decades have dramatically transformed today’s workplaces. Production rates have gone up tremendously, but the upswing in production and convenience in the work-
place has come with heavy employee monitoring and diminishing employee privacy. A report from the Workplace Surveillance Project of the Privacy Foundation, which monitors employee monitoring worldwide, shows that globally 35% of the 100 million online workforce are monitored. This compares well with the reported 27% of the 40 million online employees in the USA (Schulman, 2001). Other organizations, like the American Management Association (AMA), are reporting similar figures. According to the AMA, there has been a noted steady increase in employee monitoring. For example, in 1997, 15% of all surveyed companies reported monitoring their employees. By 2001, according to the AMA, that number had risen to 46%. During the same period, AMA reported that the monitoring of files on computers had risen from 14% to 36% (Panko, 2004).

Employee monitoring is a dependable, capable, and very affordable process of electronically or otherwise recording all employee activities at work and also increasingly outside the workplace. The Internet and its associated technologies have accelerated the monitoring processes, substantially making them more evasive and intrusive.

In this chapter we are going to look at the factors influencing employee monitoring, reasons for monitoring, technologies employed by employers, deployment of monitoring technologies, effects of monitoring on employees, ways employees can protect themselves against monitoring, and monitoring beyond the company gates — the government role.

**Factors Fueling the Growth of Employee Monitoring**

The growing rate of employee monitoring can be attributed to the availability of tools to do it, the ease of setting up of these tools, the growing use of Internet access in the workplace, and the growing availability of monitoring software and hardware products.

Andrew Schulman (2001a-d) reports that worldwide sales of employee monitoring products like software are skyrocketing, reaching sales of hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars a year. In fact, Wensense, a monitoring software company and one of the big eight monitoring software developers that also include Baltimore MIMEsweeper, SurfControl, Symantec I-Gear, Elron Internet Manager, Tumbleweed MMS, N2H2, and Telemate, reported a growth rate of around 33% per year in 2000. In the same year, Baltimore MIMEsweeper reported a net increase of 80%.
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