

Scramblers on Police Radio Calls Found Too Costly Here

You police buffs who like to eavesdrop on Station X will be glad to know Cincinnati Police considered installing electronic scramblers to garble all radio calls, but dropped the idea because it would cost too much.

Scramblers prevent bad guys from listening in on police calls and using this intelligence to their own advantage. Hamilton police are installing scramblers. But they can afford to; they haven't that many cars.

Cincinnati has hundreds, and a paired scrambling set (one encoder, one decoder at each end) costs anywhere from \$400 to \$2300, depending on how many codes you want to be able to pick from. Police here feel very few—if any—criminals successfully use police-radio broadcasts to their own ill advantage.

Exception: They suspect some rioters tuned in, because looters and mobs often vanished just before police arrived. But anti-riot communications are handled over special mobile units. Scramblers aren't mobile, and they're so complex, a riot would end before the scrambler could be hooked up.

A scrambler cuts a message electronically into precisely-timed segments. Some segments are delayed a few milliseconds, some are passed right through. The result on the air is gibberish. An unscrambler set to exactly the reverse sequence of segments and delays puts the message together again.

Primitive scramblers—in use 20 years ago—simply inverted words. Each word went on the air backwards, but in proper order. "No" went on as "own." "Cat," as "tack." "Cincinnati" was "Eetaanissniss."

The system was too simple. The man who invented it could even speak the language, talking gibberish into a mike, getting intelligible messages out.

Remember: You read it first in the Eetaanissniss Tsoap dnaa Smeyt-Rahts.

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