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Tuesday, July 12, 2005

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## Sheriff's Office gave paper wrong version of 911 tape

By MATTHEW DOIG  
[matthew.doig@heraldtribune.com](mailto:matthew.doig@heraldtribune.com)

SARASOTA COUNTY -- The Herald-Tribune's analysis of a 911 call in which a man believes he can hear his father being murdered may have been flawed because the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office provided a low-quality recording.

An expert hired by the Herald-Tribune to analyze the 911 call didn't hear the voice of the victim. He reported hearing a frantic Maria Cohen tell a 911 operator that her husband had a heart attack and wasn't breathing.

But sheriff's officials acknowledged last week that they gave the newspaper the wrong version of the recording.

The Sheriff's Office had agreed to provide the original tape recording of the 911 call. Instead, the newspaper was given a copy that was at least one generation removed from the original.

Each time a copy of a copy is created, the sound quality deteriorates.

A second-generation copy could have obscured voices that can be heard on the original, said Paul Ginsberg, the nationally renowned expert hired by the Herald-Tribune.

Because of that possibility, the Sheriff's Office has agreed to provide an original copy to the Herald-Tribune, which will then pay for a new analysis.

Sheriff's officials agreed Monday to reimburse the Herald-Tribune for half the cost of the original analysis, about \$1,500.

Sheriff's officials apologized for the mistake, which they blamed on miscommunication. The person who was asked to provide the newspaper a copy simply pulled the wrong tape from the evidence room, according to sheriff's spokesman Lt. Chuck Lesaltato.

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"It was a misunderstanding," Lesaltato said.

In May, the Herald-Tribune asked Sheriff Bill Balkwill for access to the original 911 call. Balkwill refused, claiming that the tape could be damaged if it was copied. But the sheriff relented after a Herald-Tribune attorney argued that the original was a public record.

Cohen's son, Steve Esdale, claims that his father's voice can be heard on the 911 tape cursing his newlywed wife, Maria Cohen.

The 911 call was one aspect in a larger story about Esdale's two-year effort to prove that his father was murdered, and that officials conspired to cover up the crime.

Investigators have repeatedly ruled Cohen's death natural.

The Herald-Tribune published the story, titled "A father's death, a son's obsession," on June 12. The story quoted Ginsberg refuting a similar audio analysis performed by GaideCom, a communications company hired by Esdale

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... y Esdale in 2003.

GaideCom experts say they hear Cohen speak during his wife's 911 call in which she tells an operator he is unconscious.

Esdale brought the mistake made by the Sheriff's Office to light when he compared his own copy of the 911 call to a copy the Herald-Tribune had posted on its Web site. The Herald-Tribune's version had gaps of silence that didn't exist in Esdale's copy. That proved that the Herald-Tribune copy wasn't the original 911 tape because, if it was, Esdale's copy would have had the same gaps.

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