

Surveillance

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ACLU releases files showing innocent Americans caught up in surveillance



▲ ACLU has said it is calling on the Obama administration 'to stop targeting people engaging in Constitutionally protected behavior like taking photographs.' Photograph: Luke MacGregor/Reuters

Associated Press in San Francisco

Thu 19 Sep 2013 15.28 EDT

Civil liberties groups released newly obtained documents Thursday that they say show innocent Americans being swept into a broad nationwide counterterrorism program.

The American Civil Liberties Union and several other organizations released 1,800 so-called suspicious activity reports that local law enforcement officials and others submitted to two [California](#) intelligence-gathering repositories called fusion centers.

The documents, nearly all of which were obtained by the ACLU through a public records request, do not appear to show valuable counterterrorism intelligence.

"An off-duty supervising dispatcher with Sacramento PD noticed a female subject taking pictures of the outside of the post office in Folsom on Riley Street this morning," reads one suspicious activity report created June 4, 2010, and released Thursday. "The female departed as a passenger in a silver Mazda."

Another reports a Lodi Police Department sergeant "reporting on a suspicious individual in his neighborhood." The sergeant, whose name is

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redacted from the document released Thursday, said he "has been long concerned about a residence in his neighborhood occupied by a Middle Eastern male adult physician who is very unfriendly."

The fusion center program was a target of a blistering Congressional report last year complaining that too many innocent Americans engaging in routine and harmless behavior have become ensnared in the program.

The ACLU and others are calling on the [Obama administration](#) to overhaul the program so that only activities with legitimate links to terrorism investigations are reported.

"We want the administration to stop targeting racial and religious minorities," ACLU lawyer Linda Lye said. She said they are calling on the Obama administration "to stop targeting people engaging in Constitutionally protected behavior like taking photographs."

A Senate report last year concluded that the multibillion-dollar information-sharing program created in the aftermath of 9/11 has improperly collected information about innocent Americans and produced little valuable intelligence on terrorism. The report suggested the program's intent ballooned far beyond anyone's ability to control.

What began as an attempt to put local, state and federal officials in the same room analyzing the same intelligence has instead cost huge amounts of money for data-mining software, flat screen televisions and, in Arizona, two fully equipped Chevrolet Tahoes that are used for commuting, investigators found.

The lengthy, bipartisan report was a scathing evaluation of what the Department of Homeland Security has held up as a crown jewel of its security efforts, which has created 72 fusion centers across the country to collect reports from local law enforcement and others. Some 1,700 of the reports released Thursday came from the fusion center in Sacramento.

A Senate Homeland Security subcommittee reviewed more than 600 unclassified reports over a one-year period and concluded that most had nothing to do with terrorism.

Homeland Security Department spokesman Matthew Chandler at the time called the senate report "out of date, inaccurate and misleading." He said that it focused entirely on information being produced by fusion centers and did not consider the benefit the involved officials got receiving intelligence from the federal government.

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