Homeland Security’s Data Vacuum Cleaner In Action

An Investigation by the Identity Project
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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has quietly perfected and begun to implement their scheme that will require Americans to seek and get permission from DHS in order to travel both domestically and abroad.

The results of an investigation by the Identity Project show that DHS is actively collecting information on what Americans read, with whom they associate, and the ethnicity of individual American travelers. DHS is also actively acquiring the travel records of Americans that document non-US travel, e.g. intra-European flights.

Almost one hundred pages of travel records were turned over by DHS to the Identity Project in response to Privacy Act requests. These documents – many heavily redacted – make clear that DHS is not being honest and forthright with the American public.

I. ATS, APIS, Secure Flight: Different Bottles, Same Water

A. The Bottles

For years, DHS ran a secret travel surveillance program called the Automated Targeting System. This data mining program came to light earlier this year when DHS announced plans to openly monitor the international comings and goings of Americans with a legal version of the scheme called the Automated Passenger Information System, or APIS.

APIS, which is now fully operational, places requirements for government-issued travel credentials on all Americans as well as individualized, explicit, prior, per-flight permission to travel (“clearance”) by DHS on every American citizen wishing to leave or enter the United States. In conducting APIS, DHS pulls in huge amounts of data on every passenger.

Secure Flight will put these same requirements on all Americans for domestic travel. Under Secure Flight, an American wishing to fly within the United States will need permission from DHS for each segment of his travels.

B. The Water

The main source of information DHS uses to determine whether to grant an American permission to travel by air comes from their flight reservation, or PNR. The PNR contains a wealth of deeply personal information, as this report will soon show. For DHS to argue that the APIS foreign travel surveillance program and the Secure Flight domestic travel surveillance program are separate and distinct is a fiction, if not an outright falsehood. They are but two bottling plants drawing water from the same spring.
II. The Identity Project Investigation

When word first leaked of the existence of the hitherto secret ATS program, the identity Project filed a series of Privacy Act records requests on behalf of US citizens who had traveled overseas. DHS eventually turned-over almost one hundred pages of documents in response to the requests. The documents received consist of the travel dossiers compiled by DHS on five American citizens, including PNRs and border inspection records.

A. Findings.

1. DHS is maintaining records of the books individual Americans read, as shown in this DHS Customs and Border Protection document:

![Image 1](image1.png)

2. DHS keeps track of the race of American travelers, as this secondary inspection record shows:

![Image 2](image2.png)

3. DHS keeps records of where US citizens state they have traveled, their profession, and with whom they have associated:

![Image 3](image3.png)
4. The individual travel reservation (PNR) data information is pulled in its entirety by DHS rather than filtered and then pushed by the airlines. This means that a tremendous amount of highly personal information is vacuumed-up by the US government, analyzed, and stored. While DHS’ Transportation Security Administration (TSA) states that flight records will be destroyed within days of the completion of travel, they say they will store the travel details of ‘suspected terrorists’ for decades. TSA defines all Americans as ‘suspects’, and will therefore never destroy any travel data collected.

The sensitive information contained in an individual PNR vacuumed-up by DHS includes the telephone numbers of both the American and the number given to the airlines while abroad for contact if the flight is cancelled (here a family member living in Tokyo):

…the record locators of others with whom they travel:

…who their travel agent is:

…and the initials of the individual agent:
Even the different possibilities the travel agent explored before choosing the best route for the American traveler are in the PNR and are stored by DHS:

DHS also collects and stores flight details on travel having nothing to do with US international travel. In this example, an American traveled from Berlin to Prague and then onward to London:
III. Conclusions.

By keeping tabs on what individual citizens read and with whom they associate, the Department of Homeland Security is collecting data on the free exercise of 1st Amendment activities in direct violation of the Privacy Act 1974. The Department of Homeland Security is violating the fundamental right to travel, a right elemental to the free exercise of so many other rights, by requiring American citizens to get permission from DHS in order to leave or enter the United States, or to travel by air within the United States.

The documents obtained by the Identity Project most likely are but the tip of the iceberg when analyzing the degree of invasiveness perpetrated by DHS on an unsuspecting American public.

Congressional action is urgently needed to investigate and defund all DHS surveillance programs that create this creation of records on “suspected terrorists” – meaning you – that violate the inalienable right of all Americans to travel freely, without governmental interference.