



WaPo: Customs officials Have Copied Americans' Phone Data At Massive Scale

Description

USA: U.S. government officials are adding data from as many as 10,000 electronic devices each year to a massive database they've compiled from cellphones, iPads and computers seized from travelers at the country's airports, seaports and border crossings, leaders of Customs and Border Protection told congressional staff in a briefing this summer.

The rapid expansion of the database and the ability of 2,700 CBP officers to access it without a warrant — two details not previously known about the database — have raised alarms in Congress about what use the government has made of the information, much of which is captured from people not suspected of any crime. CBP officials told congressional staff the data is maintained for 15 years.

Details of the database were revealed Thursday in a letter to CBP Commissioner Chris Magnus from Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), who criticized the agency for “allowing indiscriminate rifling through Americans’ private records” and called for stronger privacy protections.

The revelations add new detail to what’s known about the expanding ways that federal investigators use technology that many Americans may not understand or consent to.

CBP’s inspection of people’s phones, laptops, tablets and other electronic devices as they enter the country has long been a controversial practice that the agency has defended as a low-impact way to pursue possible security threats and determine an individual’s “intentions upon entry” into the U.S. But the revelation that thousands of agents have access to a searchable database without public oversight is a new development in what privacy advocates and some lawmakers warn could be an infringement of Americans’ Fourth Amendment rights against unreasonable searches and seizures.

POSTED BY: DREW HARWELL VIA WASHINGTON POST

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