



Written by [Robert Confer](#) on September 1, 2010

Big Brother's Eye in the Sky

Many Internet users look at websites that share aerial imaging technology as a novelty, a fun way to see what their house and community look like from the air. Little do they know that various levels of government around the world are using it for less amusing means. Sites like Google Earth and Bing Maps are being used as a tool to find so-called "tax cheats" and individuals and businesses that willingly or unwillingly sneaked past the building permit process.



In the nation of Greece the government has used the technology to enforce its absurd wealth tax by scanning suburbs and homes of doctors, lawyers, and businessmen in an effort to find pools, villas, and vehicles that, according to Greek officials, certainly cannot be afforded or maintained by recorded income levels. In its initial round of searches for swimming pools the government found just under 17,000 pools when only 324 had been claimed by taxpayers. Enforcing the tax code through such investigative measures has netted the nation 1.8 billion Euros in back taxes and fines in just the first 6 months of this year alone.

A little closer to home, many municipalities in the United States are following Greece's lead. In Riverhead on Long Island, Google Earth is also being used to find swimming pools, specifically those that were erected without town notice or do not meet the town's building code. In that town of 27,000 people, about 250 unregistered pools were discovered. The homeowners were forced to make their pools compliant and, of course, pay Riverhead for their permits. That one simple task brought in \$38,000 of revenues for the town.

With nations like Greece (whose financial descent is being mirrored by the United States of America) and communities like Riverhead (the size of which is similar to many communities across the country) seeing great success with aerial surveillance, many more government entities are following suit, playing around on the computer and subsequently playing hardball with property owners.

To see this in action, you need only to refer to Pennsylvania's springtime ad campaign in which they ran 30-second spots on television brazenly playing the Big Brother card. In the commercial, satellite imagery zoomed-in on a typical Pennsylvania home and a robotic narrative voice cited the homeowner for his tax evasion, noting they know where he lives and that he has a "nice car" and a "nice house."



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The ad ended with a threat to Pennsylvania taxpayers that read “find us before we find you.” It was meant to put fear into commonwealth residents — and no doubt for many it did.

The Tax Man of the Modern Age tells us a great deal of what our government has become. America was intended to be a truly unique nation — a government by and for the people — and with a government its citizens were never to fear. It doesn't matter if one is a tax evader or not. With these developments in technology and the abuse thereof, even the most law-abiding and straight-laced Americans must worry that the government could be watching our every move or analyzing the details of our last bastion of personal liberty, our homes and lands, places once rightly thought to be private and free of government intrusion.

Unlike socialist Greece, which is a very poor example for America to be following in the first place, our God-given rights are recognized and protected by a Constitution that should be preventing such an intrusion on our lives. The Fourth Amendment, which addresses this matter, so eloquently says “The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”

It's obvious that through these practices our government is exceeding the limits imposed on it. No one's privacy is secure because aerial intrusion is, without a doubt, unreasonable. Under normal circumstances the government needs just cause to enter a domain, some sort of belief that a crime has been or may be committed. With Google Earth, that has been thrown aside: Tax collectors and building inspectors don't have any inkling whether a supposed crime is being committed or not yet are allowed to search a property unabated in hopes of finding a broken law. In this case, everyone is guilty until proven innocent.

As aerial imagery technology advances even further (widespread real-time satellite surveillance is not out of the question in the coming years) and more municipalities and agencies jump onto the current bandwagon, the misuse of Google Earth and Bing Maps by tax collecting entities will hopefully see a significant struggle in the courts as more people are stung by it or wake up to Big Brother's unconstitutional and immoral abuses of its people.



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