



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on February 7, 2011

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## United States Copying Gestapo and KGB Domestic Surveillance?

The Department of Homeland Security made national headlines in December after forming a new “partnership” with Walmart, using a 40-second video statement by DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano to ask Walmart shoppers to inform on their neighbors. Napolitano says in the video message, which is being played in Walmart stores across the country: “If you see something suspicious in the parking lot or in the store, say something immediately. Report suspicious activity to your local police or sheriff.” But the video is only one part of a vast and well-funded national program creating a nation of government informants from individuals, corporations, churches, and community organizations. And the eerie part of the program is that it is focused upon getting people to inform when there is no visible crime being committed.



The “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign is being run under the auspices of the U.S. government’s Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative (NSI). The Department of Homeland Security lauded Walmart for engaging in a “new partnership between DHS and Walmart to help the American public play an active role in ensuring the safety and security of our nation.” The NSI is selling the hometown informant concept with the claim that the agency is also “ensuring the protection of citizens’ privacy and civil liberties.” But keep in mind that this is the same federal government that is routinely recording millions of Americans’ telephone calls without a warrant and permanently storing every e-mail being sent by citizens — despite an explicit prohibition in the Constitution’s Fourth Amendment on government searches without “probable cause” and a court warrant “particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.” Three federal courts have already decided that the NSA warrantless wiretapping program constitutes a blatant violation of the Fourth Amendment.

Moreover, the point is repeatedly emphasized that the focus on gaining informants would be almost exclusively in “minority and immigrant communities,” raising the ugly spectre of racism. For example, a Justice Department study entitled “Guidance for Building Communities of Trust,” funded by the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program and posted on the NSI website, explained:

The Building communities of Trust (BcoT) initiative focuses on developing relationships of trust between law enforcement, state and major urban area fusion centers, and the



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communities they serve, particularly immigrant and minority communities, to address the challenges of crime control and prevention of terrorism.

The NSI's Suspicious Activity Reporting informant program has been in the planning stages for many years. The NSI program got a local start back in 2002 under the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority, using a \$13 million federal grant. The program was expanded to the national level in 2009 and 2010. The July 2010 NSI study "Guidance for Building Communities of Trust," by Robert Wasserman, mentioned that the federal government's COPS program has had four "pilot" sites up and running for years, in the Boston, Seattle, and Miami-Dade police departments and the Texas Department of Safety. The NSI website also credits a number of national planning confabs that have taken place in recent years to help promote the "Building Communities of Trust Process":

To help with the planning of this initiative, a National Planning Team comprised of subject-matter experts from state and local law enforcement, fusion centers, community and faith-based organizations, leadership from minority and immigrant communities, privacy and civil liberties advocates, and federal homeland security, justice, information sharing, and privacy and civil liberties officials were brought together in May 2009.

That same "Fact Sheet" also mentioned that the goal of the program was "to address the challenges of crime and terrorism prevention." The use of the word "prevention" in the statement is enough to send chills down the spines of any advocate of personal privacy, since it implies that citizens would inform on their neighbors even when no crime had been committed. The Wasserman study also mentioned that a key goal of the program was to get citizens to inform on "terrorism precursor activities." What's a "precursor activity" to terrorism? He doesn't elaborate. Taken together, these statements are a bit like the Tom Cruise movie *Minority Report* where powerful psychics called "precogs" were able to detect who was going to commit a crime before it happened, and then were able to send police to arrest the would-be criminal before he had committed the crime. The difference is, of course, ordinary citizens without any psychic powers are asked to be the "precogs" informing for the federal government.

While America is not yet at the point of Nazi Germany's Gestapo or Soviet East Germany's Stasi secret police, the same racist infrastructure and vast surveillance mechanism with a focus on non-criminals is being quietly set up in the United States.



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