



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 25, 2016

Seattle Set to Deploy DHS-funded Police Body Cameras

In exchange for money and materiel offered by the federal Department of Homeland Security, many local police departments and sheriffs' offices have been joined with the federal surveillance state in Fusion Centers and are required to share intelligence, data, and images with their federal overlords.

This relationship has come under scrutiny in many parts of the country where constitutionalists and civil liberties activists see the sharing as a threat to privacy and to personal freedom.



One such controversy has arisen in Seattle, where police are about to deploy body cameras and law enforcement administrators are considering how to deal with the demand that will surely come from DHS to be given access to all the information recorded by the new equipment.

"We've been asking for a year for answers to a simple question about whether SPD is obliged to share video with federal security/intelligence agencies, and if not required, whether they will," said Community Police Commission co-chair Lisa Daugaard, as reported by the blog CrossCut.

In a remarkably frank admission, Daugaard says these questions wouldn't have come up had Donald Trump not been elected president.

Worries about what the federal government might do with the data, Daugaard says, would have been "unwarranted under Obama," but with Donald Trump in the White House, cooperation with DHS would be "reckless."

Reckless or not, there's no way Homeland Security will let the Seattle Police Department refuse to upload the body camera data to the federal servers. The only reason the cops have the cameras is because DHS gave them a \$600,000 grant for their purchase.

For now, the deployment of the body cameras is being delayed. The police previously had no problem putting them on officers' uniforms because of "trust in the Obama administration," but they're taking the rollout slowly since Election Day 2016.

Just who will have access to the information collected by the cameras once they are part of the police's everyday carry? Apart from a list of local and state agencies, CrossCut reports that "federal U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the FBI, the bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (still known as ATF)" will also be on the distribution list.

Of course, the federal DHS is the first in line to look at and log the images collected by the body cameras given the existence of a Fusion Center in Seattle.

The Seattle Police Department counts eight DHS employees on its roster.

CrossCut questioned DHS Fusion Center employees about the level of data sharing between their agency and the SPD, but the answer wasn't exactly illuminating. The article reports: "Lt. Keith Trowbridge — who works at the Washington Fusion Center — told Crosscut that the way departments



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share information is ‘not an easy thing to understand. Even being here for a while, it’s hard for me to understand how these pieces fit together.’”

In April, the *New York Times* took to a federal judge its own effort to get to the bottom of the Fusion Centers’ relationship to the police departments with whom they cooperate.

The paper asked DHS for documents that would reveal the precise legal scheme that secures DHS to local law enforcement and how invasive the former’s control of the latter is.

When DHS balked, producing only heavily redacted documents in compliance with the demand, the *Times* sued DHS for violation of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

In a story reporting on the status of the *New York Times* lawsuit, Courthouse News Service mentioned a couple of other attempts to pry the truth of the treachery out of the federal agents in charge of the DHS:

A May 2014 report by the *Times* — written via 4,000 documents obtained by a separate FOIA request — found that fusion centers had been used to track and monitor Occupy Wall Street protesters in 2011 and 2012.

The Cato Institute has alleged fusion center employees have conducted surveillance of Tea Party groups and Second Amendment rallies. In 2009 the Missouri Information Analysis Center allegedly targeted supporters of Ron Paul, a Texas congressman at the time who was then running for U.S. president.

Some of the serious constitutional violations made by the “fusion” of the Department of Homeland Security and local law enforcement was (likely unintentionally) revealed at a meeting in 2013 called “State and Local Fusion Centers: Key Challenges for the Next Decade.”

The keynote address was delivered by Representative Michael McCaul (R-Texas), chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security since 2013.

In July 2013, McCaul co-authored with Representative Peter King (R-N.Y.) a report on the progress of the establishment of the nationwide spread of the fusion centers. The press release announcing the report boasted of the pair’s support for a program that dismantles federalism and accelerates the militarization of local police and the consolidation of control of those departments to the federal government. The McCaul-King report states:

Fusion centers serve as hubs of strategic analysis and information sharing where Federal, State, and local agencies are all represented in one location. State and local crime data is coordinated, gathered and reviewed to determine if there is any potential connection to terrorist activity. In addition, Federal terrorism-related information is shared with State and local law enforcement.

In light of their oath of office, these congressmen should be reminded of the fact that there is not a single syllable of the Constitution authorizing any such federal participation in law enforcement. If the power isn’t granted to the federal government in the Constitution, then authority over that area remains with the states and the people as described in the Tenth Amendment.

Remarkably, McCaul and King lament the fact that the chain of fusion centers isn’t growing quickly enough and the DHS isn’t getting adequate access to all that information. The report added, “The Committee’s review concludes that the Network is not functioning as cohesively as it should be and fusion centers are facing numerous challenges that prevent the Network from realizing its full potential to help secure the homeland.”



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In light of the information conveyed at that conference and the millions of dollars delivered to cash-strapped police departments by Homeland Security, there's little room for doubt at how the Seattle Police Department (SPD) will respond to DHS's requests for data that will surely follow the deployment of the police body cameras — cameras they paid for — among the people of the city of Seattle.

Photo: body camera being worn by police officer in South Carolina



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