



## Mozilla wants 500M users to tell gov't: "stop watching us"

*Activists hope for an anti-spying coalition reminiscent of anti-SOPA protests.*

By: Joe Mullins – June 11, 2013

---

Hoping to tap into the wave of anti-SOPA Internet activism that flooded Congress last year, Mozilla has joined with a variety of activist groups to found an anti-spying coalition called StopWatching.Us.

The just-launched website's first order of business will be to gather signatures for a petition that demands Congress "reveal the full extent of the NSA's spying programs."

"When users fear government surveillance... a free and open Web becomes untenable," said Mozilla Privacy Chief Alex Fowler on a hastily arranged press call today. "We don't want an Internet where everything we do is secretly tracked or logged by companies or governments."

Mozilla, which makes the popular Firefox Web browser, has taken the extraordinary step of putting a link to Stopwatching.us right on the default Firefox homepage. That means millions of Mozilla users who boot up their browsers in the coming days will become aware of the coalition. In a blog post announcing the move, the company says it "hasn't received any such order [to share information] to date, but it could happen to us as we build new server-based services in the future."

The groups in the coalition range the political spectrum, from Greenpeace USA on the left to the right-leaning Competitive Enterprise Institute. Many tech-savvy nonprofits are in the group, including the Internet Archive and the World Wide Web Foundation (founded by Web creator Tim Berners-Lee).

Julian Sanchez of the Cato Institute is "personally cheerleading" the coalition even though Cato is not a member, and he offered some historical perspective to reporters on today's call.

"Time and again, a program like this is claimed to be nothing to worry about and [is] claimed to be absolutely vital to stopping terror and protecting Americans," he said. "Then those claims turn out, repeatedly, not to pan out." The Bush wiretap programs were said to be vital to saving lives, but a 2009 report found it "was not a tool of any special usefulness," he noted. Similarly, according to Sanchez, the domestic spying abuses in the 1950s and 1960s that were later revealed by the Church Committee featured "claims of security needs [that] were overstated."

EFF Activism director Rainey Reitman said on the call that the next step will be to arrange a day for concerned citizens to actually pick up the phone and contact lawmakers in Washington DC. "It's extremely important," she said. "Sometimes those thousands upon thousands of e-mails can fall on deaf inboxes."

There's also room for Internet companies to join the coalition, she emphasized. Fowler said that he wants large companies to join the coalition, but they inevitably take longer to consider such moves.

In related news today, Google published a letter that its general counsel, David Drummond, wrote to FBI Director Robert Mueller and Attorney General Eric Holder. Drummond asks for permission in the letter to be more transparent about government information requests in the wake of the NSA leaks.

"Assertions in the press that our compliance with these requests gives the US government unfettered access to our users' data are simply untrue," Drummond wrote. "However, government nondisclosure obligations regarding the number of FISA national security requests that Google receives, as well as the number of accounts covered by those requests, fuel that speculation."