



## Mozilla, others launch campaign to expose government snooping

*Dozens of political and technology groups call for full accounting of online monitoring programs*

By: John P. Mello, Jr. – June 12, 2013

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Mozilla, maker of the popular Firefox web browser, and dozens of political, technology and business groups launched a campaign Tuesday calling for action against federal agencies snooping on citizens on the Internet.

The campaign is a response to reports last week that the NSA was gathering phone information from Verizon about all its customers' phone calls, as well as raking in customer data from tech companies like Microsoft, Google and Facebook.

As part of the campaign, Mozilla has created a website, StopWatching.us, to gather signatures in support of several initiatives backed by the coalition of groups. It's calling on Congress to:

- Reform federal law to prohibit blanket surveillance of Internet activity and phone records of any person residing in the United States and to require violations of that prohibition be reviewed in adversarial proceedings before a public court;
- Create a special committee to investigate, report, and reveal to the public the extent of domestic spying and to make specific recommendations for legal and regulatory reform to end unconstitutional surveillance; and
- Hold accountable those public officials who are found to be responsible for this unconstitutional surveillance.

"Mozilla, at its core, believes that individuals' security and privacy on the Internet are not optional," Mozilla Privacy and Public Policy Leader Alex Fowler said at a news conference Tuesday.

"When users fear government surveillance or are unable to know how and for what purposes their private data is being monitored, a free and open Web becomes untenable," he added.

For more than a decade, the public has seen administrations claim programs like this NSA surveillance program to be vital for national security and subject to rigorous oversight and neither has proven to be true, Cato Institute Research Fellow Julian Sanchez said at the news conference.

"It would be bizarrely naive to simply let this drop on the basis of assertions that terror plots have been foiled and everything is very tightly controlled," he said. "We need the

kind of inquiry that -- almost every time it's been done in the past -- has revealed that the claims of the security needs were overstated and that claims about rigorous oversight to protect civil liberties were more wishful thinking than reality."

During the press session, coalition members were asked about the strength of public support for action against the NSA, especially in light of a poll by the Pew Research Center which showed that 56 percent of Americans thought the NSA surveillance programs were "acceptable."

"We've been comparing what these things are to the government coming in and ripping the curtains off your windows in your home," Free Press Internet Campaign Director Josh Levy said at the news conference. "In a lot of ways, there's no difference."

"When people hear framing like that and when they understand the true breadth of these programs, they do become truly outraged," he said.

The full accounting of the government's online monitoring efforts need not be a threat to national security, as the agencies running those programs will surely contend.

"Since it's been revealed that the government is already accessing this data, I don't think there are any additional national security ramifications in simply confirming at a high level that the program exists," Irving Lachon, director of the Technology and National Security Program at the Center for New American Security, told *CSO*.

"Admitting that they're doing this is not a problem because the bad guys now know that we're doing it, and they probably assumed that we were anyway," he said. "It's probably not a good idea to get into the specific details of what exactly what has been collected because there could be some national security implications in that."

Richard Stiennon, chief research analyst with IT-Harvest, said a full accounting of what's going on shouldn't jeopardize national security. "If there were a threat to national security we would have already experienced it."

"We already know that the NSA is on a massive information surveillance campaign-- rather successfully, evidently," he said. "So no additional harm could come from some additional transparency."

Some additional transparency could help repair the harm that's been done by the affair to the nation's international reputation. "They've done much, much more harm to the standing of the United States as a free and open society," Stiennon said. "They have to address that, as well as do the job of tracking down terrorists."