

## **Delaware's Fusion Center poses threat to liberty**

**By Thomas S. Neuberger**

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It is bad news for freedom here in Delaware now that the New Castle County police have their own Fusion Center. Virtually every state now has one in operation or formation after more than \$1.4 billion dollars of Homeland Security money was spent to create 77 of them nationwide to assist in the overstated war on terror.

Their purpose is to enlist local police and first responders (known as Terrorism Liaison Officers or TLOs) to spy on fellow citizens and report back to interconnected government agencies such as the FBI, CIA, NSA and multi-state police forces on "suspicious activity" or movements, which we old timers used to consider normal everyday activity.

The local spies then report back to the "fusion centers" where the information goes out to all the government computers now active nationwide in tracking our movements, emails, phone calls, letters, Facebook posts, etc. to see if any person is worth tracking down.

Robert O'Harrow, an investigative journalist for The Washington Post, concluded they are little more than "pools of ineptitude, waste and civil liberties intrusions." In 2012 the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in a bipartisan report concluded that these Homeland Security Department fusion centers achieve very little to fight terrorism and suffer from a lack of oversight and wasteful spending of "hundreds of millions of dollars," such as flat-screen TVs, \$6,000 laptops and even SUVs used for commuting.

Many innocent constitutionally protected activities are flagged by fusion centers for follow up by our new Big Brothers in the federal intelligence community.

David Rittgers of the Cato Institute reported in 2011 that among the many innocent people and groups labeled suspicious and targeted for surveillance are pro-choice advocates, pro-lifers, environmental activists, Tea Party members, Second Amendment rally attendees, third-party voters, Ron Paul supporters, anti-death penalty advocates, and antiwar protesters. Historically black or Christian evangelical colleges, universities and religious institutions also have been considered by fusion centers to be potential hubs of extremism and terrorist activity. One report warned of a "Russian cyberattack" which turned out to be nothing more than someone accessing his work computer remotely.

Commentator John W. Whitehead has observed that "you're bound to end up with a few legitimate leads on 'terrorist' activity if you classify unemployment as a cause for suspicion, which is actually one of the criteria used by" fusion centers. "The problem with tracking innocent behavior is that more often than not innocent people will be investigated for heinous crimes."

He gives the example of a police officer reporting a man seen purchasing liquid chlorine bleach and ammonia on consecutive days. Up the fusion center chain of command this suspicious activity went, but the subsequent investigation revealed that the man only was trying to kill gophers on a golf course with chlorine gas.

The ACLU also has warned that the partnership between local police and fusion centers skates alarmingly close to illegal unreasonable searches, lacks transparency, and often just flouts the Bill of Rights altogether.

Last, it has been reported that officials at fusion centers lack basic training in intelligence gathering, let alone protecting citizen civil rights and liberties.

So, despite all the hoopla over the new toys acquired by our local police with our very own Delaware fusion center, there is no cause for rejoicing as we move one step closer to the future predicted by George Orwell when he wrote in his novel 1984 – "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever."