

[Genetic DNA Patdowns Coming](#)[| Print |](#)

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The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is no stranger to controversy. The TSA has been the subject of much scrutiny from civil libertarians and constitutionalists, who have criticized the agency's numerous affronts against the natural rights of American and foreign travelers, who have been subjected to violations of their bodily integrity and right to property.

Now, we learn that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), of which TSA is a part, is planning to [test portable technology for DNA screening](#). Which means that the day may not be far off when the TSA starts deploying the technology at airports to scan and inspect individual travelers' genetic information, effectively documenting and storing copies of individual DNA codes. Not surprisingly, the TSA denies that this would happen, [claiming at its blog](#): "TSA is not testing and has no plans to use any technology capable of testing DNA." However, the denial is not very comforting, since the same blog entry also states: "DHS S&T expects to receive a prototype DNA analyzer device this summer to conduct a preliminary evaluation of whether this kind of technology could be considered for future use. At this time, there are no DHS customers, nor is there a timeline for deployment, for this kind of technology — this is simply a preliminary test of how the technology performs." The DHS is not going to test technology it does not envision ever using, and if the test is "successful" it is hard to imagine the TSA not conducting genetic pat-downs at airports.

The TSA [already utilizes](#) a number of invasive procedures on travelers, violating their bodily autonomy, such as groping passengers' most intimate body parts, and humiliating the infirmed and disabled through such moves as confiscating a disabled boy's leg braces, and damaging a bladder cancer survivor's urostomy bag.

Genetic Patdowns

The intended program of roving genetic scanning signals a significant step towards the creation of a government-managed database of every American citizen's genetic information, known as a National DNA Database, which will be compiled as individuals pass through both genetic and body scanners, as they pass through airport checkpoints.

The DHS admission that it will pursue genetic scanning has been described by critics as amounting to a "genetic pat down," referring to the pat-down procedures already used by TSA agents on travelers' body parts. It is not enough that government is currently involuntarily taking body scans of travelers (using x-ray technology to take and document images of individuals' bodies). It is now also involuntarily taking scans of individuals' genes, as reported by [The Daily](#):

This summer, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security plans to begin testing a portable DNA scanner. The device, which has not yet been unveiled but reportedly resembles a desktop printer, is expected to make genetic tests far more common, particularly in matters related to refugees, human trafficking and immigration. As the technology is commercialized, some experts believe it will soon make its way into everyday medical and law enforcement situations. With nothing more than a swab of saliva, security officials can use the device to obtain genetic information in less than an hour. The results reveal personal details about one's ethnicity, race, and lineage. Current DNA tests can take several weeks.

According to Dr. Richard Selden, the executive director of Network Biosystems, the biotechnology firm granted an exclusive government contract to develop the genetic scanning technology, "This can be done in real time, with no technical expertise. DNA information has the potential to become part of the fabric of day-to-day life, and this facilitates that process."

As a vocal proponent of portable genetic scanning, Selden also claims that the device can be tailored for use in emergency rooms, food safety tests, law enforcement settings, and even for federal agency hiring practices, and anticipates the commercialization of his device within a year:

This really is a platform technology. The Department of Homeland Security wanted it for specific applications, but other settings might want a device for different portions of DNA. Scanners used by the DHS will analyze only a small quantity of identifying information, and won't detect genetic vulnerabilities related to health or behavior.

Selden is notably a convicted fraudster who previously [defrauded](#) the FDA, but was nonetheless granted the DHS contract, due to his political clout.

He was the defendant in a suit brought by the Securities and Exchange Commission in 2008, due to his materially misleading statements made to federal officials concerning results of his company's clinical trials its U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) application for its flagship drug, Replagal.

Selden also intentionally misled investors, inflating the company's stock by making optimistic statements about the drug, in spite of evidence that the government was unlikely to approve the drug. Selden formerly directed the pharmaceutical company Transkaryotic Therapies Inc., which had spent over \$250,000 on lobbying in the past decade, and [employed](#) the power lobbying firm Shereff, Friedman, Hoffman & Goodman LLP, known for its strong connections to the Democratic Party.

He is also one of the leaders in the field of [Rapid DNA Analysis](#), an area which many fear represents the rise of the scientific surveillance state, as it allows government officials to keep close tabs on citizens through commonplace genetic testing. Similar technology is also being produced by the US-based aerospace group Lockheed Martin, which released the RapID system in September, 2010, as part of a contract with the Department of Justice, which is looking to create a Forensic DNA database, in the name of security and preventing illegal immigration and human trafficking, two problems which are at epidemic proportions beyond the scope of genetic patdowns, which are expected to begin this summer at American airports.

Cracking Down on Civil Liberties

This developing program seeks to replicate in the United States what has already been done in several European countries that currently have government DNA databases (these countries lack governmental recognition of natural rights). The United Kingdom, for instance, created the world's first DNA database, and while created under the benign guise of fighting crime and preventing unjust criminal prosecutions, the project has risen to Leviathan proportions.

According to [Professor Alec Jeffreys](#), the danger of such a database is that it can easily serve to place innocent citizens under increased surveillance: "Hundreds and thousands of innocent people have had their genetic details stored for up to 12 years. There is a very disturbing presumption not of innocence, but of guilt here."

The Justice Department DNA database plans are based on the already existing British plan, and will only be further streamlined through the DHS planned genetic scanning, a scenario which presents numerous threats to the constitutional rights of the American people. According to Cato Institute Director of Policy Studies [Jim Harper](#), the genetic scanning represents another blow to civil liberties:

There are still a lot of unknowns. I'm not certain we know what all is being gathered when we examine DNA. So far, there has been no comprehensive public discussion of what is being gathered, and how it should or shouldn't be used has not occurred.

Harper also cautioned that the new initiative represents another step in the federal government's creation of a British-style DNA database. A bill sponsored by Senators John Cornyn and Jon Kyl, for instance, allows for the creation of a national database that collects the DNA of all arrested persons, whether or not they have been convicted.

Harper notes that currently, those arrested or detained would have to petition to have their information removed from the database after their cases were resolved, and warns that the new initiative represents a continuation of this [anti-privacy ethos](#):

It's a classic mission-creep situation. These guys are playing a great law-and-order game ... and in the process creating a

database that could be converted into something quite dangerous.

The Rise of the Surveillance-Industrial Complex

This is another clear example of the rise of a Surveillance-Industrial Complex, as government conscripts big business and individuals in the construction of a society that cracks down on individual privacy rights.

Fear of terrorism is being exploited to create a new industrial base for surveillance technology, unfettered by reasonable and effective privacy constraints, which threatens to fundamentally alter the American way of life.

Christopher Miles, Biometrics Manager for the DHS, says that the machines are expected to cost about \$275,000 apiece. Miles also attempted to rationalize the exorbitant purchases (which have been exclusively contracted to [Network Biosystems](#) and Lockheed Martin, the latter of which has cornered the defense industry as the top US federal contractor), saying that they present a more affordable alternative to government-run genetics labs (as if genetic security facilities are a necessity):

That sounds like a lot of money, but compare that to a laboratory full of equipment that would cost millions of dollars and a building that would cost tens of millions of dollars.

Miles is a frequent [speake](#)r at biometrics industry conferences and trade shows, and has also championed technologies such as concealed weapons and license plate recognition sensors, all of which are further expansions of government surveillance power (targeted against the constitutional right to privacy and right to bear arms).

He also claimed that once the rapid scanners are in production, the more likely the cost will go down (i.e., The more scanners ordered by the government, the more ingrained taxpayer funding of the scanners will become).

The federal government's next incursion into the realm of surveillance is a logical progression in a series of events indicative of the gradual erosion of our liberties. Corporate cronyism and partisan connections, lobbying, and an overall culture which rejects Lockean natural rights in favor of a Hobbesian surveillance state, are all the building blocks of a "brave new world" in which ones genes are not even safe from the reach of government.