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## Watching the watch lists

**By: Maria Schmitt****Special to The Examiner****06/11/09 8:10 PM EDT**

Less than 24 hours after a security guard at the Holocaust Museum was shot and killed by a man on the Secret Service watch list, D.C.-area authorities gathered to discuss the importance of watch lists and intelligence communication groups called fusion centers.

More than 70 fusion centers, or government-created intelligence centers, exist nationwide. Created after the Sept. 11 attacks, the centers aim to gather intelligence used to prevent criminal or terrorist activity.

Harvey Eisenberg, a U.S. attorney and head of the U.S. Attorney's Office's National Security Section, argued in their favor at a Cato Institute forum Thursday.

"If we had had fusion centers and the terrorist watch list before 9/11, the two guys who said they were going to the Newark Airport could have been stopped," he said.

Michael German, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, said watch lists weren't as important as they seemed to be because of their size.

"There are 1.1 million people on the terrorist watch list, and there's a 35 percent error rate, minimum, for that list," said German, a former FBI agent.

He was referring to a percentage cited in a report released last month by the Office of the Inspector General. People whose names appear on the list are scrutinized and can be prevented from getting on planes or be stopped at national borders.

As of Thursday afternoon, the ACLU Web site's terrorist watch list meter read 1,218,421 people.

Former U.S. Attorney for the District Joseph DiGenova later told The Examiner that watch lists were worthwhile but should be carefully managed.

"It's important to have them, but they have to be run well and they have to be scrubbed regularly," he said.

DiGenova cited examples such as a 4-year-old boy or an Air Force pilot mistakenly being placed on the

watch list.

Of Wednesday's museum shootings, DiGenova said, "That's gonna happen, it's the nature of the beast."

In addition, he said that projects as large as national terrorist watch lists and fusion centers tended to have growing pains.


"Anytime the government does anything this big, it's going to screw it up for a long time because it's not done right," he said.

In order to effectively use fusion centers and watch lists, he said, they have to be organized and run well, with strict guidelines.

"Things can get out of control quickly if they're not supervised well."

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