



Feds getting under our skin

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This is creepy.

When the government started using full-body scanners over the past few years to screen passengers at airports and people visiting federal buildings, it promised that the electronic images would not be stored. That's because the scanners basically see through clothing, revealing a nude image. (Magnetic scanners, in use for decades, do not reveal such a detailed image.)

The government promised that the body-scan images would be purged immediately from scanner memory banks. Instead, reports CNet News, "[n]ow it turns out that some police agencies are storing the controversial images after all. The U.S. Marshals Service acknowledged last week that it had surreptitiously saved tens of thousands of images recorded with a millimeter wave system at the security checkpoint of a single Florida courthouse.

"This follows an earlier disclosure by the [Transportation Security Administration] that it requires all airport body scanners it purchases to be able to store and transmit images for 'testing, training, and evaluation purposes.'"

Not only adults, but children, are scanned. This well "could be" the government making child pornography, Jim Harper told us; he's director of information policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute. "The question is brought up from time to time by people whose kids go through it." The question becomes even more acute now that the government might be storing the images somewhere.

And, as a Washington Post series two weeks ago revealed about the huge, unaccountable security agencies, no one really knows what information is collected by the government, or what is done with it.

Mr. Harper said that the full-body scans, as opposed to the older magnetic scans, provide a minuscule amount of added security for much greater intrusion into people's privacy. Moreover, attempted terrorist attacks in recent years have been averted by people on the planes, not by government actions. He cited the alleged Dec. 25, 2009, attempt to blow up a plane by the "Underwear Bomber," who is awaiting trial.

"People object in the abstract" to the scans, Mr. Harper observed. "But they get to the airport and act like sheep. They do what they're told."

Perhaps if enough people object, these digital Peeping Toms will be discontinued.

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