

Privacy Rights - Big Brother's Bumbling

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The General Accounting Office has reported the federal government is ignoring individual privacy rights of citizens. Not only is it ignoring guidelines, the actions being taken may serve to put your privacy at more risk of being violated.

Government Run Amuck

Five federal agencies are charged with using electronic data mining tools to track terrorist, catch criminals and prevent general fraudulent behavior. In using these tools, the agencies are supposed to fall a set of guidelines designed to protect your privacy. None of the agencies are doing so. In fact, they are doing just the opposite.

According to the GAO, the five federal agencies repeatedly failed to follow guidelines. These failures either "increased the risk that personal information could be improperly exposed or altered" or "limited the ability of the public -- including those individuals whose information was used -- to participate in the management of that personal information."

In investigating the situation, the GAO looked at five federal agencies. The agencies are the Agriculture Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service, Small Business Administration and State Department. The GAO found none of the agencies had complied with privacy guidelines and only three had even considered them.

Of this list, three groups are particularly worrisome. The IRS, obviously, controls incredibly delicate information for every person in the United States. The Agency has already reported problems with staff and agents giving out information over the phone to potential identity thieves. The FBI definitely needs to track terrorist and criminals, but how comfortable are you with the government sifting your person information without restriction? The Small Business Administration is particularly troubling as it collects detailed financial and background information to determine whether it should provide small business loans. Getting into that database would be like finding the Holy Grail for an identity thief.

Privacy rights are not the most glamorous of subjects and you may dismiss articles about them out of hand. You will feel differently, however, if your identity is stolen. Richard A. Chapo is a San Diego business lawyer with <http://www.sandiegobusinesslawfirm.com> - providing legal services and legal advice to businesses in San Diego, California.