



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 30, 2014

Why Is Homeland Security Paying to Put Cities Under Surveillance?

The drive to use Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grants to convert local law enforcement into heavily armed battalions of a nationwide standing army under the command of federal officers marches on.

A quick survey of some of the police departments being outfitted by the federal government will expose the extent of the coast to coast effort to obliterate local accountability of law enforcement and to make those officers dependent on the largesse of their federal benefactors.



First, the Santa Monica, California, Police Department received nearly \$800,000 from DHS days ago. A March 28 *Santa Monica Mirror* story on the “donation” reveals the earmarks for the funds.

Officially approved as part of the City Council’s consent calendar agenda at its Tuesday meeting, the grant money would, according to City staff, be used “to purchase equipment and training that supports regional homeland security goals.”...

“Funds were requested to purchase equipment and training that supports regional homeland security goals, specifically an automated license plate reading system for the Police Department, terrorism liaison officer training, hazardous material (HazMat) training and equipment, urban search and rescue (USAR) training and equipment and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) training and equipment for the Fire Department,” City staff stated.

Notice the mention made of surveillance equipment (license plate tracking system), terrorism, and urban riot preparedness. Hardly the bailiwick of a local police department.

Next, the headline of a story out of Wisconsin is enough to invoke the ire of constitutionalists in the Badger State: “State cops can track residents’ cellphones.”

The story under that headline, from the *Fond du Lac Reporter*, demonstrates the immense capacity of cops to violate the Fourth Amendment:

Police in Wisconsin have at least two devices that secretly track cellphone locations in real time to target suspects or missing persons — technology that simultaneously mines data from hundreds or thousands of unsuspecting people nearby.

Such sophisticated surveillance equipment doesn’t come cheap. The *Reporter* writes:

The suitcase-sized Stingray masquerades as a cell tower to trick cellphones into connecting to it. It can show police phones within a mile or more, depending on terrain. Records show the DOJ Stingray cost more than \$150,000, and the DOJ and Milwaukee police both purchased upgrade packages that topped \$100,000.

In fairness, it’s not just Wisconsin law enforcement using this technology to track citizens. As noted by



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the *Reporter*:

An investigation by USA TODAY and Gannett media around the country found at least 25 police departments outside Wisconsin own a Stingray. More than 30 other agencies refused to say whether they own one.

Tracking cellphones without warrants is just the beginning of the monitoring in Milwaukee. The Fox TV channel in Milwaukee reports that the city is being equipped with surveillance cameras mounted on buildings and in other locations. Why do the nearly 600,000 residents of Wisconsin's largest city need to be under the watchful eye of government? Common Council President Michael J. Murphy explained:

It is now quite commonplace in business and commercial districts across the U.S. and the world to have mounted surveillance cameras monitoring activity, because they have proven very effective in helping to deter crime and also helping to solve crimes.

Really? Consider this report [published by *The New American* in January](#) covering a similar deployment of surveillance cameras in Houston, Texas, and Evanston, Illinois:

Perhaps citizens [of Houston] should overlook their elected leaders' acceptance of such federal largesse, given that the 900 or so surveillance cameras already in place have had such a favorable effect on crime rates in the city.

Not so much.

... From [local CBS affiliate] KHOU: "Officials say data is not kept to determine if the cameras are driving down crime."

If the cameras aren't being used to reduce crime, just what are they being used for?

"We also know from experience and from recent events that the government will inevitably abuse its use of personal information attained by spying on us. Houston needs to re-think and reject this proposal," [regional director Amin] Alehashem [of the Texas Civil Rights Project-Houston] said in his press release.

Precisely. These cameras — thousands upon thousands attached to poles and buildings from coast to coast — are not about crime reduction, but about liberty reduction.

Residents of Evanston, Illinois, seem to see the surveillance that way, too.

Over 100 citizens of this Chicago suburb have signed petitions requesting that the city council publicize all the information regarding a proposal to add "3.7 miles of surveillance cameras" along city streets.

Evanston's plan to expand its surveillance capabilities has a couple of things in common with the Houston program.

First, there is the lack of evidence that the cameras make residents safer. [Consider this report](#) published ... in a local news blog:

Evanston resident Bobby Burns, who is collecting signatures online and in person in the neighborhood around the high school, told Patch he believes the city council does not have enough research to back up the surveillance camera proposal.

"If these cameras are really about student safety, there should be credible data that clearly supports the need," he wrote in an e-mail. "If this is about youth homicides, protecting senior



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citizens, or keeping an eye on police [officers], let's respect the importance of those issues and discuss them individually with care and consideration."

So, just like the cameras in Houston, the cameras in Evanston (population 75,430) don't seem to reduce crime or make anyone safer.

They are likewise unlikely to make Milwaukee safer, either.

Why the move to constant monitoring, then?

In Logan, Utah, the police took money from the feds to keep their communications secret, scrambling them so as not to be detectable by civilians. [HJNews.com](#) reports:

The Logan City Police Department has officially received grant money allowing them to purchase software that will encrypt scanner radio traffic in high-risk situations.

The police department received \$26,812 from the Utah Department of Homeland Security, enough to put encryption software on 30 police radios.

According to Asst. Police Chief Jeff Curtis, about half of those radios will go to police officers who are assigned to the SWAT team. The others will be spread out among administrators, negotiators, select paramedics and dispatch.

It seems that if local police were determined to protect and serve the citizens of Logan, they would be best served by allowing those citizens access to information regarding crime. To keep such communications secret is not only contrary to peace and order, but to principles of local control over law enforcement, as well.

Finally, St. Louis citizens will soon be subject to surveillance by local police equipped with DHS-provided facial recognition software. The story in KMOV quotes a local official justifying the acceptance of the federally funded technology:

"If someone robs a bank and cameras capture that face we then take that picture, put it into a computer system through a scanning system and that goes through the existing mug shot data basis looking for known criminals that would match that picture," he said. "It's no different than a detective or a victim going through binders of pictures looking for a match of that individual."

In fact, it is significantly different. Mug shot binders are full of photos taken by police after a person has been arrested. Cameras equipped with facial recognition software will record the faces of everyone who comes within the scope of their lenses without regard to warrants or reasonable suspicion of criminal activity.

Unlike mugshots, the pictures of the faces of people living in or visiting St. Louis will be recorded just in case they are ever needed. This is a search and seizure made in violation of the Fourth Amendment, and it should concern the nearly 3,000,000 residents of the metropolitan area, as well as the millions of tourists who visit the city annually.

All the foregoing is evidence that Americans are witnessing (often mutely) the rapid establishment of a federal police force built upon the foundation of formerly free local law enforcement and equipped with technology, tactics, and weapons of immense power.

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