



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on January 6, 2011

Behind Janet Napolitano's Neighborhood Informant Video

The Department of Homeland Security made national headlines forming a new “partnership” with Walmart using a 40 second video statement by DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano that asked Walmart shoppers to inform on their neighbors back in December. Napolitano says in the video message, which is being played in Walmart stores across the country:



If you see something suspicious in the parking lot or in the store, say something immediately. Report suspicious activity to your local police or sheriff. But the video is only one part of a vast and well-funded national program to create a nation of government informants from individuals, corporations, churches and community organizations.

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The program is called the “If You See Something, Say Something” [campaign](#), and is being run under the auspices of the U.S. government’s Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative (NSI). The Department of Homeland Security lauded Walmart for engaging in a new partnership between DHS and Walmart to help the American public play an active role in ensuring the safety and security of our nation. The NSI is selling the hometown informant concept with the [claim](#) that the agency is also ensuring the protection of citizens privacy and civil liberties. But keep in mind that this is the same federal government that is [routinely recording millions of Americans telephone calls without a warrant](#) and permanently storing every e-mail being sent by citizens in [giant data centers](#) despite an explicit prohibition on government searches in the Constitution’s [Fourth Amendment](#) without probable cause and a court warrant with a list of specifics of what’s being searched and what will be found with the search. Three federal courts have already [decided](#) that the NSA warrantless wiretapping program constitutes a blatant violation of the Fourth Amendment, but the NSA spying program has continued on seamlessly from the Bush administration to to the Obama administration.

Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative even has its own [website](#), which notes that the SAR program gets state and local cooperation through the carrot of federal aid through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), both of which have lavished billions of dollars in federal aid upon local police forces.

The SAR program is more-or-less explicitly racist, and throughout SAR material the point is repeatedly emphasized that the focus on gaining informants through communities of trust would be almost exclusively upon minority and immigrant communities. For example, a Justice Department study funded by the federal COPS program (posted on the NSI website) entitled Guidance for Building Communities of Trust [explained](#) that:



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The Building communities of Trust (BcoT) initiative focuses on developing relationships of trust between law enforcement, state and major urban area fusion centers, and the communities they serve, particularly immigrant and minority communities, to address the challenges of crime control and prevention of terrorism. Being effective in these areas requires meaningful sharing of information and collaboration among law enforcement agencies, and between the community and police.

Long in the planning stages

The NSI's SAR informant program has been in the planning stages for many years. The NSI program got a local [start](#) back in 2002 under the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority using a \$13 million federal grant. The program expanded to the national level in 2009 and 2010. The July 2010 NSI study *Guidance for Building Communities of Trust* by Robert Wasserman [mentioned](#) that the federal government's COPS program has had four pilot sites up and running for years, the Boston, Seattle and Miami-Dade police departments and that Texas Department of Safety. The NSI website also [credits](#) a number of national planning confabs that have taken place in recent years to help promote the Building Communities of Trust Process:

To help with the planning of this initiative, a National Planning Team comprised of subject-matter experts from state and local law enforcement, fusion centers, community and faith-based organizations, leadership from minority and immigrant communities, privacy and civil liberties advocates, and federal homeland security, justice, information sharing, and privacy and civil liberties officials were brought together in May 2009.

That same Fact Sheet also [mentioned](#) that the goal of the program was to address the challenges of crime and terrorism prevention. The use of the word prevention in the statement is enough to send chills down the spines of any advocate of personal privacy, since it implies that citizens would inform on their neighbors even when no crime had been committed. The Wasserman [study](#) also mentioned that a key goal of the program was to get citizens to inform on terrorism precursor activities. What's a "precursor activity" to terrorism? He doesn't elaborate. Taken together, these statements are a bit like the Tom Cruise movie [Minority Report](#), where powerful psychics called precogs were able to detect who was going to commit a crime before it happened, and then were able to send police to arrest the would-be criminal before he had committed the crime. The difference is, of course, ordinary citizens without any psychic powers are asked to be the precogs informing for the federal government.

But the NSI's SAR program is only one of thousands of federal agencies tasked with finding intelligence on international terrorism. A December 20 *Washington Post* [study](#) entitled "Monitoring America" found that there are 3,984 federal, state and local organizations working on domestic counterterrorism, 934 of which have been created since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Photo: U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano speaks during a luncheon to the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials in Denver on Thursday, June 24, 2010: AP Images



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