

The British Government Is Spying On You: Dog Fouling, Sun-Bed Use, Toy Sales, Theatre Tickets, Feeding Pigeons...

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The Guardian [published](#) a piece entitled “Revealed: British councils used RIPA to secretly spy on public“, on Christmas Day at 7pm, a time that almost no-one reads news, you may have missed it.

For those unaware of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 or RIPA as mentioned in this article, the laws were passed in July 2000 and updated in 2003, 2010 and 2015. (Read the [legislation.gov.uk](#) page [HERE](#))

Its primary purpose is: “In the interests of national security, for the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime and for the purpose of safeguarding the economic well-being of the United Kingdom.” The Act specifically covers activities as follows:

1. Interception of communication
2. Use of communications data
3. Directed surveillance (covert surveillance conducted for the purposes of a specific investigation or operation)
4. Covert human intelligence sources (establishes or maintains a covert personal or other relationship)
5. Intrusive surveillance (covert surveillance taking place on residential premises or in any private vehicle)

Most people are aware that the first two reasons of the Act allows surveillance of literally everyone. The British people seem to have fully accepted this without contest. The last three of these primary reasons for the Act are for surveillance operations required for “preventing or detecting serious crime” – right? Wrong!

It appears from The Guardian report, after what obviously amounts to some sort of mass submission of Freedom of Information requests, that local councils were given permission to carry out more than 55,000 days of covert surveillance missions.

Under RIPA, special permission is supposed to be required by councils using surveillance techniques that requires the use of secret listening devices, covert surveillance cameras and even private detectives. Some of these cases obviously make use of all five reasons given for justifying their actions.

Councils were authorised for missions which included the reasons of selling

tobacco and alcohol to minors, targeted dog fouling enforcement, investigating dog barking complaints, the sale of toys, car clocking, the sale of theatre tickets, feeding pigeons and the selling of counterfeit products at car-boot sales and markets – hardly the activities of serious criminals and concerns of national security. I suppose one could argue that selling a stolen second hand bike at a car-boot sale might constitute an economic threat.

TruePublica reported on the use of Ripa last November in an article “[Britain’s Draft Investigatory Powers Bill AKA Population Control 3.0](#)” where we exposed councils using the same terror laws for the surveillance of under-age sun bed use, hunting unpaid council tax along with the BBC tracing non-payment of the mandatory license fee and even school catchment claims made by parents attempting to get their children into more desirable schools. In one case, covert cameras were set up to monitor garden rubbish.

At that time the government stated that RIPA “would only be used when absolutely necessary to protect British people from extreme threats”. This line is quoted in The Guardian article this time around. Clearly this cannot be the case.

[Brian Paddock](#), Lim Dem peer and ex-head of CID and Deputy Commissioner at London’s Met Police said “it is absurd that local authorities are using measures primarily intended for combating terrorism for such trivial matters. Spying on the public should be a last resort not an everyday tool”.

Even Lord Paddock acknowledges that government, its agencies and councils cannot be trusted with such powers by stating that “there is a significant risk that authorities will use powers in a way that parliament never intended”. Of anyone in the House of Lords, or even Parliament itself, he would know.

In defence of abusing these terror laws The Guardian report quoted Councillor Colin Smith who said “council officers deal with complaints day in and day out about socially inadequate individuals fly-tipping and preying on the weaker, more vulnerable members of our society, normally the elderly and this technology is key to bringing their worst excesses to heel.” He mentioned that the council “kept to the letter of the law to prevent any so-called spying taking place on law-abiding individuals. This is again another admission that either RIPA was poorly designed or is being fully abused by government and its agencies.

Studies, like the one written by Jon Penney at the University of Oxford have already revealed that mass surveillance is changing the way people use the internet. The study entitled: “[Chilling Effects: Online Surveillance and Wikipedia Use](#)” clearly makes the point that “results from the case study, offer compelling evidence for chilling effects associated with online surveillance.” Glenn Greenwald at The Intercept provides his view on that same study with an article “[New Study Shows Mass Surveillance Breeds Meekness, Fear and Self Censorship.](#)”

Further studies to come will inevitably reveal comparable changes to human behaviour more widely under a state controlled by a (political police) force that secretly supervises citizens’ activities. This cannot be over-emphasised. The direction of these laws is self-evident.

TruePublica has time and time again explained and illustrated that new surveillance laws, [outlawed in the EU](#), much of it even outlawed in the US, will be used for reasons other than its stated purpose – RIPA has fully demonstrated this.

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