

U.S. Spy Agencies to Launch Computerized “Smart Clothing” Under Guise of “Better Health Monitoring”

According to the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association, “SMART ePANTS could revolutionize the Internet of Things by collecting data to help intelligence, medical and sports communities.”

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*The U.S. Intelligence Community (IC) recently [launched](#) an effort to make **computerized clothing** a reality — a move critics say could result in **massive biometric surveillance of citizens and an increase in people’s exposure to [radiofrequency radiation](#)**.*

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) on Aug. 22 announced that the IC’s advanced research and development arm, Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA), would develop its computerized clothing program — Smart Electrically Powered and Networked Textile Systems, or [SMART ePANTS](#) — over the next three-and-a-half years.

The government’s SMART ePANTS program works to create clothing with “[integrated audio, video, and geolocation sensor systems](#) that feature the same stretchability, bendability, washability, and comfort of regular textiles.”

Items slated for production [include](#) shirts, pants, socks and underwear.



Program "Sensing Events"



**Track 1:
Listen**

Track 1: Listen (Audio)

- 60 min. of verbal conversation at ≥ 60 dBA SBL, 2 meters from sensor, 400-3200 Hz freq. range
- Speech Transmission Index 0.6/1.0 or higher.



**Track 2:
Look**

Track 2: Look (Photo/Video)

- $\geq 55^\circ$ field of view
- 360 monochromatic photographs, can OCR Read 12-point text at (200-500 lumens/m²) at ≥ 50 cm
- Two-minute monochromatic video, resolution of Group 2, Line 2 USAF Test Chart (200-500 lumens/m²), > 30 frames/sec at ≥ 50 cm



**Track 3:
Locate**

Track 3: Locate

- Determine location 6x over the course of 1 hour, +/- 10 m indoors at 100 m distance from a point of reference
- No reliance on satellite navigation

IARPA, in partnership with the Naval Information Warfare Center, Pacific, [awarded research contracts](#) to develop and manufacture the computerized clothing totaling over \$22 million to [Nautilus Defense and Leidos, Inc.](#), according to an Aug. 9 Pentagon [announcement](#).

[SRI International](#), the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) and [Areté](#) received undisclosed amounts to develop the technology, according to an [article](#) in The Intercept.

Investment giants [Vanguard and Black Rock](#) — which benefited from the sale of [COVID-19](#) vaccines and have ownership stakes in technology companies developing [vaccine passports](#) and digital wallets — are listed among [Nautilus Defense's](#) and [Leidos'](#) top investors.

SMART ePANTS Program Manager [Dawson Cagle, Ph.D.](#), who [traced](#) his inspiration for the program to a desire for better health-monitoring options for his diabetic father, [said](#) in the recent press release,

“IARPA is proud to lead this first-of-its-kind effort for both the IC and broader scientific community which will bring much-needed innovation to the field of ASTs [Active Smart Textiles].”

An [article](#) published in January in PubMed hyped the potential of electronic textiles as a “new age of wearable technology for healthcare and fitness solutions,” touting their uses in products as varied as diapers, masks and bedding, and for such applications as “monitoring health conditions, treating chronic diseases, rehabilitation, and improving health and social lifestyles.”

“SMART ePANTS could revolutionize the Internet of Things by collecting data to help intelligence, medical and sports communities,” [wrote](#) the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association.

But critics — including [Ted Claypoole](#), legal expert and [cyberspace law committee](#) chair for the American Bar Association — said IARPA’s program raises major “obvious” privacy

concerns.

Claypoole told [The Defender](#) that fabrics being developed by the IC are likely “not just for keeping our people safe, but also for finding and following smart-fabric wearers who do not know they are being followed.”

The development of smart fabrics and computer wearables is not a new effort, he said.

In their book, “[Privacy in the Age of Big Data](#): Recognizing Threats, Defending Your Rights, and Protecting Your Family,” Claypoole and Theresa Payton traced commercial efforts to create smart clothing over the past decade, including a ski jacket with earphones in the hood and input devices on the sleeve that connect to the wearer’s phone via bluetooth.

However, the fact that these smart wearables are being designed by the IC is particularly worrisome to Claypoole:

“The technology, when used by the government, opens a new level of intrusion that raises serious Constitutional concerns. Will the government need a warrant to anonymously track people using these fabrics? It should, but that determination will need to be made by courts over time.”

‘I question whether any of this is legal’

W. Scott McCollough — [Children’s Health Defense](#) (CHD)’s chief litigator for the organization’s [electromagnetic radiation](#) (EMR) cases — shared Claypoole’s concerns.

“While the person choosing to wear the computerized clothing at least has given some kind of consent, all those around that person have no say at all,” McCollough said.

“I question whether any of this is legal,” McCollough added. “The technology will gather biometric data from those nearby, as well as capture all audio and visual data. There are states where [all-party consent](#) is required for this.”

Nicole de Haay, an IARPA spokesperson, [told The Intercept](#) that IARPA programs are “designed and executed in accordance with, and adhere to, strict civil liberties and privacy protection protocols.”

“IARPA performs civil liberties and privacy protection compliance reviews throughout our research efforts,” she added.

The IARPA did not elaborate further on how it would ensure that citizens’ privacy is not breached.

Computerized Clothing Likely to Exacerbate Negative Health Impacts of EMR

Miriam Eckenfels-Garcia, director of the CHD’s EMR work, pointed out that computerized clothing also raises potential health concerns.

“As with all new technology that is being sold as exciting and new,” she said, “there are concerns and drawbacks. We know about the [negative health impacts of EMR](#). Having this technology so close to the body could pose additional health risks.”

Moreover, Eckenfels-Garcia added,

“SMART ePANTS is a step closer to the merger between humans and technology. This technology, with its many sensors, makes you part of the [Internet of Things](#), which is part of the [World Economic Forum](#)’s agenda.”

Annie Jacobsen, author of “[The Pentagon’s Brain](#),” about the [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency](#), pointed out that SMART ePANTS’s developments could usher in troubling new forms of government biometric surveillance.

“They’re now in a position of serious authority over you,” Jacobsen [told The Intercept](#). “In TSA, they can swab your hands for explosives. Now suppose SMART ePANTS detects a chemical on your skin — imagine where that can lead.”

U.S. Spy Agencies Spend Billions — And Want to Spend More

IARPA noted the “smart” clothing could “assist personnel and first responders in dangerous, high-stress environments, such as crime scenes and arms control inspections without impeding their ability to swiftly and safely operate.”

In addition to running IARPA, the ODNI also oversees the National Intelligence Program which in 2022 was given \$65.7 billion of taxpayer money by Congress. For its 2023 and 2024 budgets, the program asked Congress for [\\$67.1 and \\$72.4 billion](#), respectively. These amounts are not yet approved.

The ODNI director, appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the senate, [serves as the head](#) of the U.S. Intelligence Community by advising the president, vice president, the National Security Council and the Homeland Security Council on intelligence matters related to national security.

‘We need an electronic privacy bill of rights’

According to [John Whitehead](#), a civil liberties attorney and author, we have already moved into a system of total surveillance. The government’s funding of computerized clothing that spies on its citizens is yet another example of this, he told The Defender.

Whitehead said that the [FBI already collects samples of citizens’ DNA](#).

“Supposedly, the police say they are doing their job to collect this information and that it doesn’t violate the Fourth Amendment. Well, that’s a stupid argument,” he said, adding that the courts are always behind when it comes to technology.

Whitehead said:

“Most judges do not understand it. Most are so either pro-government or pro-police that they’re going to do anything to get around [saying that it is unconstitutional].

“What we need now in this government is an electronic privacy bill of rights.”

Whitehead is working with a number of law firms to develop the concept of a legal document that “really clearly” protects citizens from electronic privacy violations of this kind.

Realistically, there is no way to escape surveillance, according to Whitehead.

“The only hope we have is if enough people will get vigilant for freedom and we can establish some kind of electronic privacy bill of rights that will limit what these people can do,” he said.

“Education precedes action, so I’m telling people to get educated about what’s going on and understand this,” he added.

Watch IARPA’s program manager discuss SMART ePants:

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