

NSA to stop using bulk US phone data in November

July 28 2015



Protesters stage a demonstration on Capitol hill in Washington, DC on March 12, 2014

The National Security Agency will cease its access to most bulk data collected under a controversial surveillance program in November, but retain records for litigation purposes, officials said Monday.

The office of the Director of National Intelligence said in a statement

that the bulk telephony data—the subject of leaks by former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden which shocked many in the US and abroad—would be destroyed "as soon as possible" to comply with a law passed by Congress in early June.

The statement said that during the 180-day transition period required under the USA Freedom Act, "analytic access to that historical metadata... will cease on November 29, 2015."

But it added that "for data integrity purposes," NSA will allow technical personnel to continue to have access to the metadata for an additional three months.

Additionally, the statement said NSA must preserve bulk telephony metadata collection "until civil litigation regarding the program is resolved, or the relevant courts relieve NSA of such obligations."

The data kept for litigation "will not be used or accessed for any other purpose, and, as soon as possible, NSA will destroy the Section 215 bulk telephony metadata upon expiration of its litigation preservation obligations."

The USA Freedom Act sought to roll back the powers of the NSA under the Patriot Act, and notably Section 215, which authorized a vast data sweep program the agency said was aimed at tracking potential terrorists.



The National Security Agency headquarters at Fort Meade, Maryland seen on January 29, 2010

The new law halts the NSA's ability to scoop up and store metadata—telephone numbers, dates and times of calls, but not the content—from millions of Americans who have no connection to terrorism.

It shifts responsibility for storing the data to telephone companies, allowing authorities to access the information only with a warrant from a secret counterterrorism court that identifies a specific person or group of people suspected of terror ties.

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