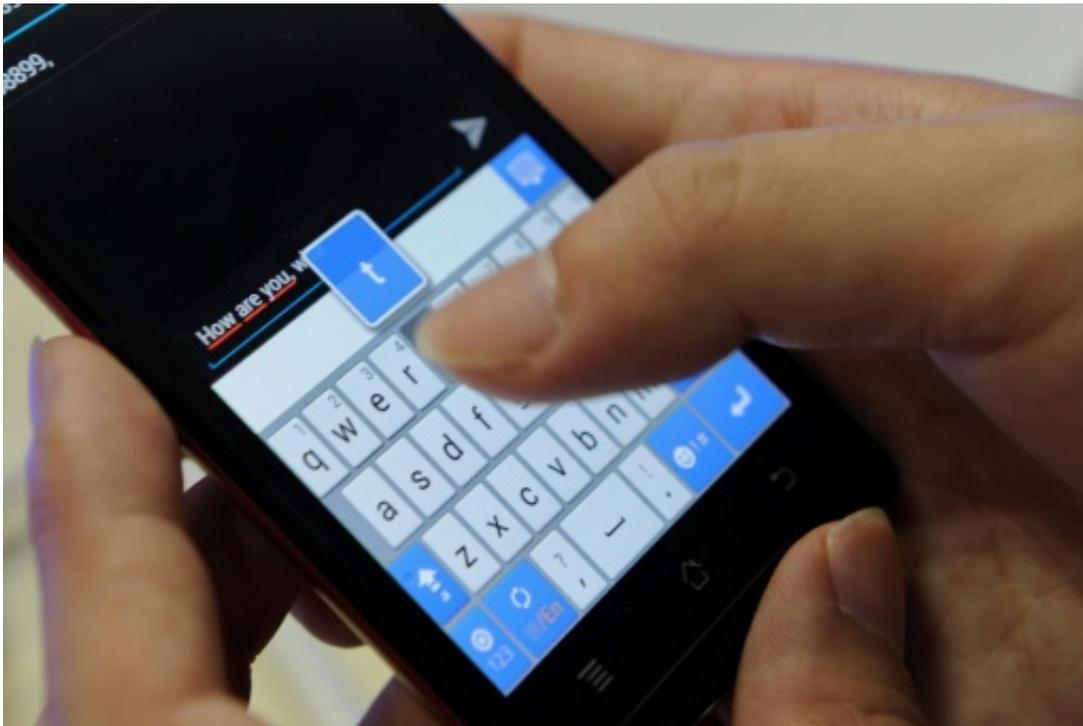


US NSA spy agency halts controversial email sweep

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Under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, it is allowed to scoop up a US citizen's emails or texts with someone outside the country if those merely mention a specific NSA surveillance target—so-called "about" collection

The National Security Agency announced Friday it would end its controversial practice of sweeping up any email or text message an American exchanges with someone overseas that makes reference to a real target of NSA surveillance.

The powerful US spy agency said that although it has the legal power to continue scooping up such communications, it would halt the practice to protect the privacy of US citizens.

"NSA will no longer collect certain internet communications that merely mention a foreign intelligence target," it said in a statement.

The NSA, the country's premier signals intelligence body, is permitted to collect communications of any foreign target, but not that of Americans except in certain situations, or if it gains a warrant to do so.

Under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, it is allowed to scoop up a US citizen's emails or texts with someone outside the country if those merely mention a specific NSA surveillance [target](#)—so-called "about" collection.

The practice has sparked heavy criticism from civil liberties advocates, who say it violates constitutional protections. Many have threatened to try to block the renewal of Section 702 at the end of this year if the law is not tightened.

But the country's [intelligence](#) community wants the law to be renewed unchanged.

The NSA said it would voluntarily end "about" collection even if it means that it might lose access to other important information in the fight against cyber threats and terrorism.

Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, praised the move but said that Section 702 needs multiple changes.

"To permanently protect Americans' rights, I intend to introduce legislation banning this kind of [collection](#) in the future," he said.

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