

Organizational Rights: Tips on Surveillance and Security

Ever since COINTELPRO, it has been clear that government surveillance is pervasive. Here are some tips for counteracting it:

- **Private conversations:** go outside and take a walk or go somewhere public and notice who is near you. Never say anything you don't want to hear repeated when there is any possibility of being recorded.

- **Documents:** always copy irreplaceable documents and computer disks and keep copies off-site. Keep sensitive data and membership lists under lock and key.

Keep personal phone book and membership and donor lists away from light-fingers.

- Know your printer, mailing house, and anyone you trust with any part of sensitive projects. Don't hire strangers as messengers.

- **Sweeps for electronic surveillance:** are only effective while being done, and only as good as the people doing them.

- **On the phone:**

No coded conversations. If you are being tapped and the transcript is used against you in court, the coded conversations can be alleged to be anything.

Don't say anything on the phone you don't want to hear in open court.

No gossip. Smut is valuable to anyone listening; it makes everyone vulnerable.

- **Tails:** if followed, get the tag number and description of car and people in it. Photograph person(s) following you, or have a friend do so.

If followed, or you feel vulnerable, call a friend; don't "tough it out" alone. They are trying to frighten you. It is frightening to have someone threaten your freedom.

- **Debrief after incidents.** Write details down: time, date, occasion, incident, characteristics of the person(s), impressions, anything odd about the situation. Keep a "weirdo" file and keep notes from unsettling situations and see if a pattern emerges.

- **FOIA:** write for your file, pursue the agencies until you have all documents under your name.

- **Brief your membership** on known or suspected surveillance.

- **Report thefts** of materials from your office or home to police. Theft is a crime.

- **Assess your undertaking** from a security point of view; understand your vulnerabilities; assess your allies and your adversaries as objectively as possible; do not underestimate the opposition. Do not take chances.

Recognize your organizational and personal strengths and weaknesses.

- **Discuss incidents** with family, friends, membership. Call the press if you have hard information about surveillance or harassment.

- **Visits from the FBI:** Don't talk to the FBI (or any government investigator) without your attorney present. Information gleaned during the visit can be used against you and your co-workers. Get the names and addresses of the agents and tell them you will have your attorney get in touch with them. They rarely set up an interview under those circumstances.

Don't invite them into your home. Speak with agents outside. Once inside, they glean information about your perspective and lifestyle.

Don't let them threaten you into talking. If the FBI intends to empanel a grand jury, a private talk with you will not change their strategy.

Lying to the FBI is a criminal act. Any information you give the FBI can and will be used against you.

Don't let them intimidate you. So what if they know where you live or work and what you do? This is still a democracy and we still have Constitutional rights. They intend to frighten you, don't let them. They can only "neutralize" you if you let them.

Remember: the United States is a democracy; we have Constitutional rights. Dissatisfaction with the *status quo* and attempting to mobilize for change is protected. Surveillance and harassment are violations. Speak out.

Edited by MCPREFL, P.O. Box 13417, Dinkytown Stn., Minneapolis, MN 55414, from an article by Sheila O'Donnell of Public Eye Magazine.

Minnesota Coalition
To Prevent Repressive Federal Legislation
PO Box 13417
Dinkytown Station
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414

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