

ACLU challenges 'no fly' list of terrorism suspects

A lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union says airline travelers have been unfairly stopped

By Anastasia Ustinova
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WASHINGTON — The Bush administration's "no-fly" list of terrorism suspects, used to screen passengers on the nation's airlines, has snared hundreds of innocent travelers and violated their civil rights, a lawsuit filed Tuesday contends.

The suit, filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, charges that seven passengers were erroneously stopped, searched and questioned by airline security officials because their names were on the list. None were criminals, but they were detained because they had similar names.

The ACLU suit charges that this has

happened to "hundreds if not thousands" of travelers. More than 600 million passengers boarded U.S. airplanes in 2002, according to the Air Transport Association, a trade organization.

"I am not a hijacker. I am not a terrorist. The government has no reason to put my name on a list of suspected terrorists," said David Fathi, one of the plaintiffs, who also said he has been interrogated six times in the last two years.

The lawsuit contends that searching and questioning people whose names are similar to those on the list is unconstitutional, and the ACLU said it intended to ask a federal judge to halt the practice.

A spokesman for the Transportation Security Administration, which created the list and requires airlines to use it, declined to comment on the suit's allegations. Spokesman Mark Hatfield said the no-fly list was highly accurate, but that sometimes there were "false positives" in the screening process.

Since just after Congress passed the Transportation Security Act following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, airlines began to screen passengers by comparing information about them with the no-

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Reginald Shuford
ACLU staff attorney

fly list of terrorism suspects. The passengers whose names are on the list must go through additional screening and may be barred from flying.

The ACLU also contends that some people are placed on the list mistakenly, violating their constitutional right to freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures. Once on the list, the

ACLU charges, the passengers are stopped every time they fly, yet are unable to correct or even check the government's database.

"Our clients are totally innocent," said Reginald Shuford, the ACLU staff attorney for the case. "What happens to them is much more than a minor inconvenience. They are routinely subjected to humiliating treatment ... delayed and interrogated."

The lawsuit was filed in federal district court in Seattle, where three of the seven plaintiffs live. The ACLU identified the plaintiffs as a retired Presbyterian minister, an Air Force sergeant, a college student, a lawyer, two employees of the ACLU and an employee of the American Friends Service in Philadelphia, a Quaker organization.

Not much is known about the "no-fly" list. The TSA has declined to comment on how many people are on the list or how it is compiled.

David Stone, the TSA's acting admin-

istrator, assured congressional lawmakers last month that a new screening system should cure some of the problems with the list.

Called the Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System, or CAPPS II, it will reduce errors by comparing passengers' names with information in other governmental and commercial databases. A passenger advocate's office will give customers an opportunity to correct the database.

The ACLU seeks assurances that data collected for CAPPS II won't be used for other purposes or retained after the passengers' flights.

"We have no problem with the government doing whatever it can to make us safe," the ACLU's Shuford said. "Simply what we want ... is for our clients to be treated just like every other innocent passenger who attempts to fly."

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Net Detective fails to meet its advertised standards

A pay Web site designed to find out private information on people could not find its own satisfied customers

By Mike Wendland
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

The promise is bold: "Find out the truth about anyone."

Click the link to read more, and you'll learn that you can "perform criminal background searches on new friends, or ... find lost loves or family members."

These are just some of the claims of Net Detective, one of the Internet's most advertised products, sold through e-mail offerings and Web site affiliates since 1996. Harris Digital Publishing Group, which markets the system, claims it has 750,000 happy customers.

I decided to invest \$29 and see for myself what it offered. The verdict: I am not a happy customer.

I thought I'd check out Net Detective by contacting some of the cus-

tomers whose testimonials tout the supposedly amazing number of personal details they discovered about others.

For instance, there's Marianne Clewiston of Elmira, N.Y., who is quoted on hundreds of Net Detective promotions saying: "I have been telling my friends about Net Detective. I have also been snooping on my friends, and they don't even know it. I found out how much alimony and child support my next-door neighbor gets, and that my neighbor across the street has some big credit problems. This is AWESOME!!!"

So I ran her name through Net Detective's People Search database. I figured there'd be no problem because Net Detective claims it contains information on nearly 200 million people, developed from information contained in phone directories, motor vehicle records, voter registrations and many other public files.

Zero results. Net Detective couldn't seem to find its own customer.

OK, so then I tried Marsha Seiler of Dallas, quoted as saying "30 minutes

after downloading Net Detective I had located my long-lost college roommate and had her on the phone."

Nothing.

Surely, I thought, I could find Robert J. Carlson of St. Paul, Minn., described as a private investigator with over 22 years' experience who claims Net Detective now lets him "locate hard to find information in minutes that used to take hours or even days."

Net Detective found no trace of the investigator. So I called the Minnesota Board of Private Detectives and Protective Agent Services, which licenses private investigators. A spokesperson said it hadn't heard of him, either.

All these people may indeed exist. But if they do, I couldn't locate them in Net Detective's people-finding database.

It also couldn't find me when I typed in my name, even though I'm registered to vote and have a driver's license and own property. I tried another half-dozen names of friends or relatives. The only ones it found were those who had listed telephone numbers.

I could have done just as well by calling telephone information or using one of the free programs out there, like Switchboard (www.switchboard.com) or AnyWho (www.anywho.com).

Net Detective is really a Web site that links to lots of other Web sites. Want criminal information? It links you to your county government, the FBI's Most Wanted site or similar free public resources. Want bankruptcy info? You're directed to a federal court site.

Indeed, much of the information Net Detective offers can be found on free public records Web sites. Do a Google search on "public records," and you'll find all sorts of resources providing similar access at no charge.

In some cases, Net Detective tries to get you to shell out \$9.95 for a three-day pass for something called Net Detective Plus that offers "unlimited access" to a criminal database, a Social Security index of deaths, a sexual offenders database and a database of unclaimed money.

Maybe this stuff really is unique. But before shelling out more money, I'd urge you to do that Google search. You can be your own net detective for free.

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