



NSA uses ‘Google-like’ tool to share billions of calls, emails

By [Julian Hattem](#) - 08/25/14 02:14 PM EDT

The National Security Agency uses a “Google-like” search engine designed to share more than 850 billion records about people’s communications with nearly two dozen other government agencies, according to documents leaked by Edward Snowden.

The documents, which were [obtained by the Intercept](#), shed a light on the secretive way government agencies share records with one another.

According to a 2010 memo outlining the sharing tool, more than 1,000 analysts from 23 government agencies had access to the NSA’s trove of records about emails, phone calls, Web chats and cellphone location information collected without a warrant. Documents were routinely shared with the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration and CIA, according to a separate slide.

The majority of information contained in the search engine, known as ICREACH, appeared to be about foreigners, though millions of record about American citizens also seemed to be included, the Intercept reported.

“The ICREACH team delivered the first-ever wholesale sharing of communications metadata within the U.S. Intelligence Community,” a 2007 top-secret memo said.

Metadata includes information about who sent and received communications, the times messages were sent and the frequency of people’s communications — but not the actual content of their conversations.

The top-secret memo added that officials did “considerable work ... to ensure appropriate legal and policy approvals for this new technical capability.”

Another document from 2007 called the search tool “a one-stop shopping tool” for analysis about people’s communications.

In a statement shared with The Hill, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which oversees the NSA and other intelligence agencies, called the “appropriate and prudent sharing of information” a “pillar” of intelligence practices after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Sharing information that is legally collected and “minimized” to hide personal identification, the ODNI added, allows analysts to “develop vital intelligence leads without requiring access to raw intelligence collected by other [intelligence community] agencies.”

Access to NSA data “is strictly limited to those with the training and authority to handle it appropriately,” it added. “The highest priority of the intelligence community is to work within the constraints of law to collect, analyze and understand information related to potential threats to our national security.”

The ICREACH tool did not appear to be connected to the NSA’s storehouse of information about Americans’ phone calls, which was one of the most controversial programs unveiled by Snowden last year, but is accessible by a small number of NSA officials. Legislation currently being debated in Congress would end that program and require the NSA to obtain a court order before getting information about people’s phone calls.

Instead, ICREACH reportedly shares information collected under an order signed by former President Ronald Reagan and amended by former President George W. Bush that authorizes the NSA to nab data in other countries. Critics have warned that the order also allows the NSA to sweep up vast quantities of Americans’ communications so long as they are “incidentally” picked up in the course of a foreign investigation.

<http://thehill.com/policy/technology/215900-nsa-uses-google-like-tool-to-share-billions-of-calls-emails>