

NSA Whistleblowers: NSA Collects ‘Word for Word’ Every Domestic Communication

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Anyone Who Says the Government Only Spies On Metadata Is Sadly Mistaken

PBS interviewed NSA whistleblowers William Binney and Russell Tice this week.

Binney is the NSA's former director of global digital data, and a 32-year NSA veteran widely regarded as a "legend" within the agency. Tice helped the NSA spy with satellites for 20 years.

Binney and Tice confirmed that the NSA is recording every word of every phone call made within the United States:

[PBS INTERVIEWER] JUDY WOODRUFF: Both Binney and Tice suspect that today, the NSA is doing more than just collecting metadata on calls made in the U.S. They both point to this CNN interview by former FBI counterterrorism agent Tim Clemente days after the Boston Marathon bombing. Clemente was asked if the government had a way to get the recordings of the calls between Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his wife.

TIM CLEMENTE, former FBI counterterrorism agent: On the national security side of the house, in the federal government, you know, we have assets. There are lots of assets at our disposal throughout the intelligence community and also not just domestically, but overseas. Those assets allow us to gain information, intelligence on things that we can't use ordinarily in a criminal investigation.

All digital communications are — there's a way to look at digital communications in the past. And I can't go into detail of how that's done or what's done. But I can tell you that no digital communication is secure.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Tice says after he saw this interview on television, he called some former workmates at the NSA.

RUSSELL TICE: Well, two months ago, I contacted some colleagues at NSA. We had a little meeting, and the question came up, was NSA collecting everything now? Because we kind of figured that was the goal all along. And the answer came back. It was, yes, they are collecting everything, contents word for word, everything of every domestic communication in this country.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Both of you know what the government says is that we're collecting this — we're collecting the number of phone calls that are made, the e-mails, but we're not listening to them.

WILLIAM BINNEY: Well, I don't believe that for a minute. OK?

I mean, that's why they had to build Bluffdale, that facility in Utah with that massive amount of storage that could store all these recordings and all the data being passed along the fiberoptic networks of the world. I mean, you could store 100 years of the world's communications here. That's for content storage. That's not for metadata.

Metadata if you were doing it and putting it into the systems we built, you could do it in a 12-by-20-foot room for the world. That's all the space you need. You don't need 100,000 square feet of space that they have at Bluffdale to do that. You need that kind of storage for content.

JUDY WOODRUFF: So, what does that say, Russell Tice, about what the government — you're saying — your understanding is of what the government does once these conversations take place, is it your understanding they're recorded and kept?

RUSSELL TICE: Yes, digitized and recorded and archived in a facility that is now online. And they're kind of fibbing about that as well, because Bluffdale is online right now.

And that's where the information is going. Now, as far as being able to have an analyst look at all that, that's impossible, of course. And I think, semantically, they're trying to say that their definition of collection is having literally a physical analyst look or listen, which would be disingenuous.

Slate confirms that the NSA is [playing word games](#):

Collect. If an intelligence official says that the NSA isn't "collecting" a certain kind of information, what has he actually said? Not very much, it turns out. One of the NSA's [foundational documents](#) states that "collection" occurs not when the government acquires information but when the government "selects" or "tasks" that information for "subsequent processing." Thus it becomes possible for the government to acquire great reams of information while denying that it is "collecting" anything at all.

Indeed, the government is [spying on just about everything we do](#).

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