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## Police store photos of peaceful protesters on criminal database

Police are storing details of innocent people who attend political demonstrations for more than seven years, it has emerged.

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By Matthew Moore

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The Metropolitan Police last night confirmed it uses a criminal database to hold private information about protesters, including those who have not been convicted or accused of any crime.

The records are said to contain photos obtained by video surveillance of rallies and meetings as well as details of the demonstrators' political affiliations.

Activists who attended anti-war marches, climate change campaigns and protests against the proposed third Heathrow runway are among those whose personal data is stored on the Crimint database, which also contains intelligence on suspected criminals.

Last night civil liberty campaigners said that the police could be breaking the law by keeping information on innocent people. The Met Police's video surveillance techniques are well known but it was previously unclear whether and for how long they kept the data.

Corinna Ferguson, Liberty's legal officer, said: "A searchable database containing photographs of people who are not even suspected of criminal activity may well violate privacy rights under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act. It is particularly worrying if peaceful protesters are being singled out for surveillance."

Police have not disclosed the number of activists on the database but one unnamed surveillance officer reportedly told a court said it contained details of "thousands" of campaigners.

A Metropolitan Police spokesman said that the database only contained details of protesters who officers suspected may be involved in illegal activity.

"The vast majority of people attending demonstrations will be of no interest to police - they will only become of interest to police when their behaviour leads them to suspect that the person may be organising and planning disorder or criminal offences at events," he said.

"Information where legally justified, which meets strict national guidelines, will be entered onto a Met Police database."

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