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NSA Bulk Phone Surveillance Finally Shut Down

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US spy agency the NSA has now officially shut down a controversial dragnet surveillance program first revealed by whistleblower Edward Snowden, it is believed.

A US appeals court [ruled back in May](#) that the Patriot Act didn't authorize the bulk collection of citizens' phone call data.

A month later Congress passed the USA Freedom Act, which gave the NSA the power to continue snooping, although with the caveats that agents now have to get a court order and can only request one for accounts relevant to specific investigations.

These court orders will last six months.

That's a far cry from the blanket surveillance of everyone's phone records which according to the Freedom Act was due to come to a close on midnight Sunday (EST).

The NSA is apparently [hanging on to the metadata](#) it has collected thus far while it tackles legal action brought against it.

It has also been granted an extra three months to access historical metadata "solely for data integrity purposes."

Edward Snowden first laid bare the mass surveillance programs carried out by the NSA back in 2013 to a shocked global news audience.

The NSA contractor, working in Hawaii as a systems administrator for Booz Allen Hamilton, fled to Hong Kong with thousands of top secret documents referencing surveillance operations by the NSA and Britain's GCHQ.

A month later he flew to Moscow with the aim of seeking asylum elsewhere. However, the US cancelled his passport, stranding him in the airport of the Russian capital.

The Kremlin granted him a one year temporary asylum, extended to three years, although it's not known where in Russia he's currently living.

The new legal framework applies to NSA operatives snooping on US citizens. Foreign targets are still theoretically exposed to bulk collection attempts by America's intelligence services.

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