

Innocent protesters' details collected for police databases

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POLICE are collecting information on thousands of protesters for a series of national intelligence databases, it was revealed today.

Details of activists, including photographs, are being gathered by forces and sent to a central "domestic extremism" unit for storage and analysis.

The databases feature people seen at public demonstrations, including anti-war and environmental rallies.

Campaigners can be included on the network of systems even if they have not committed a crime, it was also disclosed. One face on police "spotter cards" is comedian and political activist Mark Thomas.

Three national police units responsible for combating domestic extremism are run by the Association of Chief Police Officers' "terrorism and allied matters" committee.

It receives £9 million in public fund-

ing from police forces and the Home Office and employs a staff of 100. The domestic extremism section was set up in 2004 to combat animal rights activists who committed crimes.

The main branch, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit, runs the central database using intelligence from forces across England and Wales, which routinely deploy surveillance teams at protests and public meetings.

The unit works with two other police branches, the National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit and the National Domestic Extremism Team.

A spokesman for the units said people "should not be worried". He added: "There are lots of reasons why people might be on the database.

"Not everyone on there is a criminal and not everyone on there is a domestic extremist but we have got to build up a picture of what is happening.

"Those people may be able to help us in the future."

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