



# National Security Letters Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What are National Security Letters?**

**A:** National Security Letters (NSLs) are subpoena-like documents issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Unlike subpoenas, NSLs do not require approval by a judge.

**Q: Aren't NSLs an essential tool for fighting terrorism?**

**A:** Of the 143,074 requests for NSLs from 2003 through 2005, there has only been 1 confirmed conviction for terrorism related charges. There have been 0 convictions of suspected terrorists.

**Q: I've done nothing wrong so why should I worry about the FBI trying to seize my records?**

**A:** The FBI does not require the records sought through NSLs be connected to a suspected terrorist. The FBI does not even have to show there is probable cause that the individual whose records are sought, has committed or will commit terrorism.

**Q: Once the FBI obtains my records, my phone or Internet provider or my accountant will tell me about it so that I can clear up the misunderstanding with the FBI, right?**

**A:** Wrong. Organizations receiving NSLs (your phone and Internet company or credit reporting agencies) are prohibited from telling anyone about the NSL except for their attorney and the person who must compile the record to be turned over. Essentially you would never know that your records were gathered. Though, like many who were subjects of government spying in the 1950s and 60s, you might notice when you're turned down for jobs or can't get a promotion in a government position.

**Q: If my records have been turned over to the FBI, how long will they keep them?**

**A:** Indefinitely. The FBI has decided to maintain all of the records that it receives from NSLs. These records are available to government employees and contractors.

**Q: Aren't NSLs supposed to ensure greater national security?**

**A:** NSLs have not created greater national security. Instead they have been used to gather an abundance of information about law-abiding people.

**Q: What can I do to take action?**

**A:** Contact your Senators and Representatives and urge them to end the FBI's ability to issue NSLs. You can reach your elected representatives through the Congressional Switchboard at 202-224-3121.

**For more information, visit [fbiunbound.org](http://fbiunbound.org).**