

## **Anti-war rally gets military's scrutiny Also, Akron police videotape Quaker group's 2005 protest**

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An anti-war demonstration in Akron that drew 200 people last year also drew the attention of military officials investigating the protesters for "potential terrorist activity."

The release of documents, reported Friday by The New York Times, revealed the federal government had maintained records on the "Stop the War Now" rally held in Akron on March 19, 2005, as well as dozens of other demonstrations held across the country.

The Akron event was sponsored by the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker group that bills itself as nonviolent and peaceful.

"It's chilling, intimidating and ridiculous knowing that the government is looking at events like ours, a public event advertised as being legal and nonviolent, and deems it a potential terrorist event," said Greg Coleridge, director of the group's economic justice program.

"We were doing nothing more than expressing our Bill of Rights rights to organize and speak freely, and for that the government considers it threatening. What a waste of resources -- human and financial."

The Defense Department's release of documents showed that accounts of 1,500 "suspicious incidents" had been maintained in a government database longer than allowed, including after it was determined that no threat to military buildings or personnel existed, the Times reported.

A defense spokesman told the newspaper that the practice of "questionable data collection" had led to changes to ensure that only information on viable threats of terrorism was being collected.

Coleridge said the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio became involved in seeking the release of the government documents on the Akron rally and another anti-war meeting held in Cleveland in November 2004.

The Akron rally included a march past a downtown military recruiting office and a stop at the federal courthouse. Coleridge said the rally was marked by the presence of people he suspects were government officials sitting in unmarked cars taking pictures of the protesters.

Akron police say they were present at the rally, but not at the behest of federal officials. Videotapes were taken for security purposes, said assistant law director Mike Defibaugh.

"What Akron police did was solely and simply based on municipal policing and nothing in conjunction with the federal government," Defibaugh said.

Gary Daniels, an ACLU of Ohio spokesman, said the monitoring, surveillance and labeling of peaceful groups is troubling.

Daniels said the ACLU is still waiting to learn through the release of more government records who was responsible for the surveillance and reports on the rally and meeting.

“It's a concern because when you go out in public and express your views and dissent against the government and this surveillance is done, what you have is people being chilled by Big Brother,” Daniels said. “It also gives the impression that the government will do what it can to keep it from occurring. This is not something you want in a free and civil society.”

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