

IFIP-TC9 Statement concerning the inadvisability of National Identification Schemes (NIDS) as an anti-terrorism security measure

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The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have led governments to consider various security measures to avoid a re-occurrence of such an atrocity. National Identification Schemes (NIDS) incorporating biometric security features are prominent among the proposed measures.

The Technical Committee 9 (Relationship between Computers and Society) of the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) wishes to caution governments, the IFIP member societies, and the international community more generally of the inadvisability of this approach. Quite apart from the merits or drawbacks of NIDS for other purposes, they do not offer protection against sophisticated terrorist attack. This is because they cannot be used to detect the intention to commit a terrorist act, and depend instead on a prior record of suspicious activity to achieve preventive interception of a prospective attacker. Individuals with a 'clean' record, like most of those who committed the 9/11 attacks, will pass through the most robust identity screening process.

In addition, developing such a security-oriented NIDS in response to these attacks would inevitably undermine privacy and other civil liberties that are the foundations of democratic societies, thereby further amplifying the long term destructive impacts of the 9/11 attacks themselves.

By relying on an ineffective technique, a NIDS may actually contribute to a false sense of security that leaves us more vulnerable than before. We therefore risk impairing vital civil liberties with nothing gained in return.

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Recent positions by related information processing societies:

USACM – Association for Computer Machinery

Respected HCI expert Ben Shneiderman testified against the adoption of national identification cards on behalf of USACM at the Congressional Hearings on National Identification Card Systems. He noted that:

[T]he positive identification of individuals does not equate to trustworthiness or lack of criminal intent. (emphasis in original)

See: Shneiderman, Ben, "National Identification Card Systems," Testimony to the House Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Efficiency, Financial Management, and Intergovernmental Relations, November 16, 2001,

http://www.house.gov/reform/gefmir/hearings/2001hearings/1116_nationa_id/1116_witnesses.htm.

IEEE-USA The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers – United States of America

The IEEE-USA has strongly recommended that the use of a universal identifier (UID) be explicitly rejected.

See: Against Use Of Universal Identifiers (UIDs) IEEE-USA Position Statement - February 15, 2001,

http://www.ieee.org/organizations/pubs/newsletters/nps/0601/against_UID.htm.

For further background, see:

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) National ID Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

<http://www.cpsr.org>

Clement, A., Guerra, R., Johnson, J. and Stalder, F. National Identification Schemes (NIDS): A Remedy Against Terrorist Attack?, in Brunnstein, K. & Berleur, J. (editors) *Human Choice and Computers: Issues of Choice and Quality of Life in the Information Society*, IFIP 17th World Computer Congress, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Boston, 2002, pp 195-205.