Surveillance Impact Report

Aggregate Public Records Search Systems
San Diego City Attorney's Office

DESCRIPTION:

Aggregate Public Records Search Systems (APRSS) are web-based, on-line services provided by private companies. They provide access to public records in the United States to locate information about individuals, businesses, addresses, telephone numbers, utilities, and assets. It is a valuable tool for the San Diego City Attorney's Office (SDCAO) to investigate facts relevant to civil litigation by and against the city.

PURPOSE:

APRSS is used by the Civil Divisions of the SDCAO to perform fact investigation for assigned cases. Access to the system is granted by the designated account manager within the SDCAO. Use of the system is based on a "right to know, need to know" basis, meaning that both the employee accessing the system is authorized to use it based on their specific work duties, and that they are using it only for a specific case or task assigned to them. The use of APRSS is an essential component of case investigation that both enhances and advances the investigative process; it is used extensively in the legal community and is an integrated feature in the largest legal research platforms in the United States.

LOCATION:

APRSS is used by the Civil Divisions of the SDCAO in cases where the City of San Diego is involved in civil litigation. APRSS is accessed by SDCAO authorized employees via SDCAO computers, both in the SDCAO work site and remotely, with mandatory security protocols in place, such as a Virtual Private Network and Multi-Factor Authentication. The work sites of the SDCAO are in secure, access-controlled buildings. APRSS are web-based applications that must be accessed via a secure network connection.

IMPACT:

The SDCAO's APRSS Surveillance Use Policy safeguards civil liberties and civil rights. APRSS uses are not based on discriminatory or viewpoint-based factors. The SDCAO's use of surveillance technology is intended to support and benefit the City of San Diego while minimizing and mitigating potential impacts on community members' civil rights and civil liberties. It is used only in performing legal services for the City. The information provided by APRSS is sourced from public records and open-source information.

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MITIGATION:

The collection, use, retention, or dissemination of data shall not be used to violate the Constitutional rights of any person or be used in any manner that would discriminate against any person based upon their ethnicity, race, gender, national origin, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. APRSS provides efficient and time-saving access to public records and open-source information. APRSS does not utilize visual or audio recording capabilities or use facial recognition.

DATA TYPES AND SOURCES:

APRSS provides Department members with information gathered from public records and open-source information. Sources of information are:

ACCURINT:

Advanced Person	FAA Aircraft	Foreclosures
Death Records	Property Assessments, Deeds & Mortgages	Marriages/Divorces
Direct-to-Report	Watercraft	Sexual Offenders
Passport Validation Report	American Board of Medical Specialties	USA PATRIOT Act
People at Work	CLIA Certificate Search	Reverse Phone Append Batch
Real-Time Person Search	Comprehensive Health Care Business Search	Business
Virtual Identity/Email Search	Comprehensive Health Care Provider Search	Business Credit
Workplace Locator	Disclosed Entity Report	Businesses in the News
Canadian Phones	NCPDP Search	Corporation Filings
Real-Time Phones	NPI Data Search	Delaware Corporations
Concealed Weapons Permits	Provider Report Card	Dun & Bradstreet
Driver Licenses	Provider Sanction Search	D & B Global Market Identifiers
FAA Pilots	Provider Search	Federal Employer ID Numbers
Federal Firearms & Explosives	Bankruptcies, Liens & Judgments	Fictitious Business Name
Hunting/Fishing Licenses	Civil Courts	National UCC Filings
Professional Licenses	Court Search Wizard	OSHA Investigative Reports
Voter Registrations	Federal Civil Court Records	SEC Filings Search
Advanced Motor Vehicles	Federal Criminal Court Records	

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WESTLAW PEOPLEMAP:

Aircraft	Executive Affiliations	OFAC
Arrest	Executive Biographies	People Canada
Business Contact Records	Experian Credit Header	People E-Mail
Bankruptcy	FBN	People Household
Boats	Federal Aviation Administration	People Find
Business Profile	FEIN	Phone Records
CCW	FEIN - Additional	Political Donors
Bank Account Header Records	Global Sanctions	Professional License
Corporate Records	Healthcare Licenses	Professional License - DEA
Criminal Records & Infractions	Healthcare Sanctions	Real Property Transactions
Criminal Records - Federal	Hunt Fish	Real Property Pre-foreclosure
Criminal Records - Sex Offender	Lawsuits	Real Property Tax Assessor
D&B Worldbase Records	Liens and Judgments	UCC
Death	Liens and Judgments - NY	UCC - NYC
Deceased	Marriage	Unclaimed Assets
Divorce	Marijuana-Related Business Records	Unlawful Detainers
DMI	Motor Vehicle Service & Warranty Records	Voters Registration
DMV	National Provider Identifier	Watercraft
Driver's License	New Movers	Work Affiliations
Equifax Credit Header	Obituary	

DATA SECURITY:

SDCAO computers require user login authentication and are situated in secure buildings with access control. When working remotely, authorized users are required to login via the City's Virtual Private Network using a work computer and multi-factor authentication. Only authorized employees of the SDCAO shall access the data.

FISCAL COST:

The WestLaw PeopleMap APRSS annual subscription costs approximately $17,249.40 and is funded through the SDCAO's general fund. The current contract is billed monthly; a 5% cost increase is expected in future contracts.

The Accurint APRSS annual subscription costs $9576.85 based on the last fiscal year and it is paid through the SDCAO's general fund. The current contract is billed monthly; a 5% cost increase is expected in future contracts.

THIRD PARTY DEPENDENCE:

The SDCAO does not store data in APRSS. APRSS are managed by private vendors. APRSS vendors retain a user's search terms and case reference for audit purposes. All data stored within the platform is restricted and only accessible to authorized persons. Information can be accessed by the SDCAO user and saved in secure network drives managed by the SDCAO. No data will be stored on City hardware or network drives unless downloaded from the web application for use in a qualifying investigation.

ALTERNATIVES:

Currently, the two APRSS applications in use are the leading products in use in the United States. They have similar, but slightly different, search capabilities. There are no known competitors to these products.

TRACK RECORD:

The SDCAO has used APRSS applications for more than ten years.

The sources of information that are available in APRSS applications are generally publicly available records. Without an APRSS application, users would have to visit or contact every single source (see Data Types and Sources section above) to obtain the information for each case. This would result in an extremely time-consuming and extremely costly investigation that could not meet the challenges of present-day litigation.

The SDCAO uses APRSS multiple times each day to conduct authorized case investigations. In April 2026, a WestLaw People Map Usage Report showed 371 searches were performed. In July 2026, an Accurint billing statement showed 234 searches were performed.

SDCAO staff report that APRSS is most important in locating potential witnesses in claims/lawsuits against the City of San Diego. APRSS may provide past or present residences that aid in finding witness. Finding one witness can potentially refute a false claim that would save the City of San Diego and the citizens of San Diego millions of dollars in unnecessary costs.

APRSS provides valuable background information on plaintiffs and witnesses in cases, such as business licenses, relatives and relationships to other parties. It also provides addresses where individuals can be served subpoenas as part of litigation and it can indicate who may own a particular property involved in a lawsuit.

In one civil litigation case handled by the SDCA during the past year, a plaintiff filed a lawsuit against the City of San Diego alleging a serious injury from a bicycle collision. The plaintiff stated that he hit a pole while on his bicycle. A City Attorney Investigator discovered that a passing citizen witnessed the incident and had called 911 at the time of the incident and left when medics arrived at the scene. The witness' telephone number was disconnected when the investigator attempted to call them. The City Attorney Investigator used Accurint to obtain a current telephone number and interviewed the witness, revealing that the incident did not take place where the plaintiff alleged. When presented with this information, the plaintiff dismissed the case against the City of San Diego.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMENTS:

On September 23, 2026, at 12:00 p.m., there was a publicly held meeting broadcast live and facilitated in person in all nine Council Districts in the City of San Diego. The following surveillance technologies were presented by the SDCAO:

1. Aggregate Public Records Search Systems
2. Automated Regional Justice Information Systems
3. Products Received from Law Enforcement
4. SDLaw
5. FinCEN Query

The SDCAO video recorded this meeting so that it could be presented to a larger group. The benefit of the video was the capability of translating the presentation into over 100 languages such as Spanish, and other languages frequently used by the communities within San Diego, to maximize penetration of the materials to affected groups. The link to the video (TRUST Community Meeting - City Attorney's Office) is at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOkigc7fNdw

There were eight attendees in San Diego City Council District 3. There were no attendees in any of the other districts.

There were six public comments and no questions out of the eight attendees. There were no comments submitted to the online public comment form.

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Comment #1:

The speaker strongly opposed San Diego's continued use and funding of surveillance technologies such as ARJIS and ALPRs [Automated License Plate Recognition systems]. The speaker argued that these tools enable unrestricted data harvesting, violate civil rights, and were designed to circumvent protections rather than enhance safety. The speaker emphasized that surveillance and AI systems are inherently dangerous, cannot be responsibly regulated, and disproportionately harm vulnerable communities, especially in the context of ICE actions. The speaker concluded by urging elected officials to address these concerns and reaffirmed that the community will continue holding leaders accountable.

Comment #2:

The speaker expressed concern that technological progress should serve the public, not powerful interests. The speaker highlighted a report showing thousands of ALPR search entries labeled only as "other," which the speaker argued enables misuse despite supposed safeguards. The speaker stated that ambiguous search categories and limited auditing allow systems like ARJIS to be abused by malicious actors. The speaker stressed that subjective assurances of ethical data practices are insufficient and called for an end to the city's use of these surveillance technologies.

Comment #3:

The speaker spoke about how surveillance technology contributes to systems of displacement. He criticized the meeting's timing and short notice as a form of manufactured consent that limits public participation. The speaker also warned against relying on arrest data, noting that many arrests are biased or unconstitutional and should not inform surveillance systems. The speaker raised concerns about offsite access to these tools through VPNs and underscored that both the technologies and the processes surrounding them are deeply problematic.

Comment #4:

The speaker argued that San Diego must rethink its approach to surveillance technology. The speaker described a pattern in which society embraces new technologies without understanding their long-term consequences, using smartphones as an example. The speaker noted that individuals can control their personal devices, but government surveillance systems offer no comparable control to the public. The speaker urged leaders to follow a "do no harm" principle when implementing advanced technologies and stressed the need for transparency under the Trust Ordinance. The speaker stated that while harms from ALPRs are already known, the community still lacks critical information about ARJIS and its use.

Comment #5:

The speaker expressed frustration that the city has not followed the processes outlined in the Trust Ordinance, despite its unanimous approval. The speaker said the annual report, which passed the Privacy Advisory Board, still has not been presented to the City Council, calling this a failure of accountability. The speaker noted that required use policies and reviews for existing technologies have not occurred and criticized the city for discussing even more powerful surveillance tools without adhering to proper procedures. The speaker voiced deep concern about the impact on communities already facing risks from ICE actions and stated that the city is not taking the issue seriously.

Comment #6:

The speaker raised concerns that new surveillance technologies consistently bypass the Privacy Advisory Board, undermining its role in ensuring transparency and accountability. The speaker warned that powerful entities, including large corporations and investors, may gain access to sensitive data, which could be exploited in harmful ways. Drawing comparisons to surveillance systems in other countries, the speaker cautioned that data could be weaponized to restrict essential services or freedoms. The speaker argued that the government's partnerships with wealthy corporations contradict claims of avoiding such alliances and urged the city to scrutinize where data is being sent and how it might be used.

At an evening meeting on September 24, 2026, at 5:30 p.m., the SDCAO re-broadcast the recorded video from September 23, 2026. The link to the video (TRUST Evening Community Meeting City Attorney's Office) is at: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2uG7aHxfw0**

For the evening meeting, there were two attendees in San Diego City Council District 3 and four attendees virtually.

There were two public comments and no questions from the attendees. There were no comments or questions submitted to the online public comment form.

Comment #1:

The speaker expressed deep appreciation for meeting host and the City Attorney's Office for their presentation on surveillance technology. They describe feeling overwhelmed by the information but grateful for gaining a new awareness of privacy and surveillance. They now recognize that monitoring is constant once they leave their home and commit to being more alert while staying open to emerging technology. They closed by reaffirming their long-time support for the PAB [Privacy Advisory Board], expressing love for its work, and sharing excitement about attending an upcoming meeting.

Comment #2:

The speaker thanked the group for hosting the public forum and praised the presenter for balancing civil data collection topics with law enforcement considerations, such as "SARS" reporting and coordination with county sheriffs. The speaker raised concerns about data retention, referencing a state bill that would require judicial warrants for accessing personal data. The speaker questioned whether the standard of expunging data after 30 days is genuinely practiced and encouraged deeper discussion on both warrant requirements and long-term data retention in future PAB [Privacy Advisory Board] meetings.