

Travelers to the 2010 History of Science Society and Philosophy of Science Association conferences who will be returning to the United States should be aware of issues related to crossing the US border with laptops and other electronic equipment. There is recent controversy regarding the search and seizure of laptops by border and customs agents for people entering the US from abroad. This applies to US citizens and non-citizens. Agents are able to make arbitrary seizures of laptops for indefinite periods of time based upon any criteria they choose.

Judge Jeffrey White of the U.S. District in the Northern District of California recently qualified this. Judge White rejected the Obama administration's argument that no warrant was necessary to look through the electronic files of an American citizen who was returning home from a trip to South Korea. In this case, however, the judge was responding to the fact that the laptop in question was searched 6 months after it was seized. HSS/PSA Annual Meeting attendees returning to the US should take steps to back-up and safeguard their data.

Links for more information:

Advocacy

[Letter co-signed by AUP to Congress](#)

[Follow up letter from AAUP to Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano](#)

[AAUP's online advocacy center](#)

Tips to safeguard data from the Electronic Frontier Foundation:

[Protecting Yourself From Suspicionless Searches While Traveling](#)

and [EFF Answers Your Questions About Border Searches](#)

Press coverage of this issue:

["Expanded Powers to Search Travelers at Border Detailed"](#) *Washington Post*, 9/23/08

["Travelers' Laptops May Be Detained At Border: No Suspicion Required Under DHS Policies"](#) *Washington Post*, 8/1/08

["Judge Limits DHS Laptop Border Searches"](#) *C-NET*, 6/10/10