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# Protester sues police over surveillance database

Spy unit kept detailed record of 87-year-old John Catt's presence at more than 55 demonstrations over four-year period

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John Catt talking about the surveillance in 2010 guardian.co.uk

An 87-year-old man is launching a landmark lawsuit against police chiefs who labelled him a "domestic extremist" and secretly recorded his political activities in minute detail.

Lawyers for John Catt are due [to open the legal action](#) at the high court on Thursday against a clandestine police unit that has been at the centre of controversy over its undercover infiltration of political groups.

Catt, who has no criminal record, was "shocked and terrified" when he discovered that police had kept a detailed record of his presence at more than 55 demonstrations over a four-year period.

The police had detailed how the Brighton pensioner [took out his sketchpad and made drawings](#) of demonstrations he attended. Also logged were slogans on his clothes and details of his appearance, such as "clean-shaven".

His legal action threatens to deal another blow to the secretive [National Public Order Intelligence Unit](#), which has been covertly monitoring protesters since 1999.

The unit has [recorded the activities of thousands of campaigners](#) on a nationwide database. Defeat in the court case would put pressure on it to delete details of activists from the database.

A similar case in 2009 compelled the Metropolitan police to [remove 40% of the photographs](#) it held on a database of protesters after the court of appeal ruled that the force had [unlawfully retained an image](#) of an anti-war