

OF COURSE THE NSA CAN'T SEARCH ITS OWN EMAILS...

Justin Elliott reports that when he tried to FOIA emails between National Geographic and the NSA, the world's premier digital spying agency said they couldn't search their own emails.

"There's no central method to search an email at this time with the way our records are set up, unfortunately," NSA Freedom of Information Act officer Cindy Blacker told me last week.

The system is "a little antiquated and archaic," she added.

I filed a request last week for emails between NSA employees and employees of the National Geographic Channel over a specific time period. The TV station had aired a friendly documentary on the NSA and I want to better understand the agency's public-relations efforts.

A few days after filing the request, Blacker called, asking me to narrow my request since the FOIA office can search emails only "person by person," rather than in bulk. The NSA has more than 30,000 employees.

This shouldn't surprise him though. Fort Meade apparently can't keep a close-circuit video stream running either, if the stream to the media room at the Bradley Manning trial was any indication.

I think Elliott went about this all wrong, though.

These are, after all, US Person emails. And the NSA doesn't get US Person emails directly. Rather, they "target" the email of someone overseas, and get all the US Person emails

“incidentally.”

All Elliott has to do is FOIA emails involved with the documentary in question overseas and declare he needed the NSA side of it to understand the foreign intelligence he had gathered.

And if that doesn't work, Elliott should just ask GCHQ for the emails, as that seems to be the other cute workaround.