

FBI Acts to Notify Snooping Targets

By John M. Goshko
Washington Post Staff Writer

Attorney General Edward H. Levi announced yesterday that he has established a Justice Department committee to notify an estimated several hundred persons that they were targets of past FBI harassment tactics.

The notification program will apply to victims of covert counterintelligence programs carried out by the FBI between 1956 and 1971.

Cointelpro, as it was known within the FBI, was intended to disrupt militant political groups of the left and right and harass and discredit their members. In some instances, the FBI fabricated derogatory information about target individuals and sent it to their families and employers.

Levi's announcement said that notification will be made in cases where the Cointelpro activity was improper, where it may have caused harm to the individual and where the victims are not already aware that they were targets.

Those persons who are contacted will be advised that they may seek further information about their

cases from the Justice Department if they wish.

Justice Department sources estimated that the specifications set by Levi would result in notifications going to "several hundred persons." They added that decisions on what persons meet the specifications will be made by the review committee, headed by Michael E. Shaheen Jr., head of the department's Office of Professional Responsibility.

The sources said that the committee will review approximately 35,000 pages of material relating to Cointelpro and will contact those persons requiring notification as they are identified. The notifications, the sources said, will be made by mail, telephone or hand-delivered letter, depending on the circumstances of each case.

All requests from contacted individuals for further information will be treated as requests for government documents under the federal Freedom of Information Act, the sources added. However, the requests will be expedited.

The sources said that no decisions have been made yet about how to handle requests from individual victims for further action, such as destruction or correction of their Cointelpro files.

This point was cited yesterday by Rep. Bella S. Abzug (D-N.Y.), who criticized the plan for not giving victims an explicit chance to have their files purged of improper materials. She announced that the House Subcommittee on Government Operations and Individual Rights, which she heads, will hold hearings on the notification program on April 13.