

CAMBRIDGE: DON'T SPY ON US!

What We Know About Surveillance Cameras

■ Since 2003, the Department of Homeland Security has spent more than \$23 billion in federal grants given to local governments to fight terrorism. Through these grants the country is being networked with surveillance cameras. Cambridge and eight other Boston-area towns and cities are being wired at a cost of \$4.6 million. Even Liberty, Kansas (population 95) now has a surveillance camera, thanks to a federal grant. Cameras obtained to “fight terrorism” are susceptible to “function creep,” and are now used for a variety of law-enforcement purposes.

■ These cameras are extremely powerful. They can pan, tilt, zoom and rapidly rotate 350 degrees, all in a fraction of a second. Some can “see” for more than a mile.

■ They can be used with license-plate readers, face-recognition software, face and eye scans, radio frequency identification tags, and technology purporting to detect “anomalous” or “suspicious” behavior.

■ They can easily be misused, as in reported cases where watchers zoomed in on women’s bodies or profiled African-American males.

■ Their digital images can be easily shared, stored indefinitely and used for data mining purposes.

■ Studies in the UK, where there is one camera for every 15 people, and in some American cities, suggest they are not effective in fighting crime.



What We Don't Know About Cameras in Cambridge

■ Use

What are the capabilities of the cameras in Cambridge? What are they being used for? Are they being combined with mobile cameras or “smart” software? Who is watching them? Are the images shared? If so, with what agencies and on what terms?

■ Storage

Where are the digital images being stored? For how long? Will they be transmitted to the Commonwealth Fusion Center? Will they be used for data mining purposes? Who will have access to them?

■ Misuse

Are their safeguards in place to protect the First Amendment and privacy rights of residents? To address “function creep”? To stop the cameras from being misused? Are their plans for oversight? Penalties for abuse? Complaint procedures? What is to prevent a stored image from one day showing up on YouTube?

■ Cost

Who pays to operate the cameras? How much does it cost to monitor and maintain them? Is this a good use of scarce public safety resources?

■ Larger Cost of a Surveillance Society

Do we *want* the government watching public spaces with such powerful cameras and storing images that the cameras collect? What kind of “chilling effect” could this have? What will the future look like when the cameras are combined with even more intrusive technology? What will be left of liberty?