



READY FOR YOUR CLOSEUP?

All over the city, cameras are watching. In our quest for safety, are we giving up too much?

BY ELIZABETH M. ECONOMOU

ON A GLOOMY MIDAFTERNOON IN MARCH, middle-school students are playing ultimate Frisbee at the Bobby Morris Playfield in Capitol Hill's Cal Anderson Park. Close by, baseball players from Garfield High School run laps around the park's perimeter. Amid this swirl of springtime activity, few notice three new video surveillance cameras mounted on poles at the northern edge of the playfield, between E Pine and E Olive streets on 11th Avenue, flanked by the Richard Hugo House and Seattle Central Community College. ¶ The trio of watchful machines are part of the growing local presence of video camera surveillance by both private businesses and government. Though the amount of surveillance here pales in contrast to other U.S. cities, such as Baltimore and Chicago—or Great Britain, where the average citizen is seen by 300 cameras per day, according to Washington, D.C.-based Electronic Privacy Information Center—Seattleites are being eyed and scrutinized more than ever. And the increasing incursions into territory once considered private are raising concerns about privacy

violations as well as the incremental erosion of civil liberties.

Some businesses—such as banks and convenience stores—have long used cameras inside their buildings. But a recent survey by the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) revealed that surveillance cameras are also a big part of the city's streetscape in the downtown core. Some 15 private venues, including Nordstrom, have some type of external video surveillance cameras on their premises. Benaroya Hall has both internal and external closed-circuit TV cameras, which are monitored 24/7 by security guards, says Alan Maxey, who until recently was facility director. The cameras—which pan, tilt and zoom—monitor crowd flow and concert activity, as well as deter crime, says Maxey.

Last year the DSA proposed a plan—since scrapped in favor of adding more police officers—to add six to eight cameras in the Pike/Pine corridor to help deter crimes. Security and crime deterrence are almost always cited as justification for the cameras.

There's less than universal agreement however, that cameras actually accomplish these things. "The police presence is still the number-one deterrent to crime," says David Dillman, vice president of operations and services for the DSA. "We will always support having more police officers on the street before promoting surveillance cameras." A report by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) concluded that the use of camera surveillance by police in some California cities did not deter crime. Though some cities are spending millions on video camera systems, law enforcement officials in other cities—such as Detroit, Miami and Oakland—have abandoned them because they had little effect on crime prevention.

Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske believes the jury is still out on whether or not video surveillance cameras actually deter criminal activity, but he says they're an effective tool for obtaining evidence-making arrests and solving crimes. "We've used video surveillance in literally dozens and dozens and dozens of cases from

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