

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and Public Privacy

The first CCTV cameras were pretty crude, conspicuous, low definition black and white cameras without the ability to pan, tilt or zoom. CCTV cameras now can be almost undetectable, high-definition full color devices that can focus on minute details and are able to track people or vehicles with presets and tracking software using P/T/Z motion control systems.



CCTV or Closed-Circuit Television is a term that refers to transmitting video from surveillance cameras to a specific place to be viewable on a limited number of monitors. CCTV systems are most common in places such as casinos, banks, airports, convenience stores and military installations where there is a high possibility for theft or other crimes. These types of systems have also been installed in law enforcement vehicles, inside of taxi cabs, across city streets, inside passenger cars to better see objects around the car and so many more places. CCTV systems are also very useful in places where the environment is not suitable or safe for humans to go, such as chemical laboratories or close to a launch pad for a rocket.

A few CCTV systems even include dummy or fake security cameras that are intentionally placed in noticeable areas so that people see them as they pass by. These cameras serve to augment the real security system to increase the deterrent effects at a much lower cost. Most people will assume that every single camera is real and recording everything they do. These dummy cameras look almost exactly like the real thing; some even have motors and working lights to simulate the feel of a normal camera and even its movements. These types of cameras will fool most people that pass by, but a professional criminal will pay them no mind.

Surveillance systems are so prolific now that a lot of people see these CCTV systems as a violation of their civil liberties and will go out of their way to deliberately destroy any camera they come across; they will smash them, steal them or spray substances on the lenses, blinding the camera. However, to be very specific, these systems are not watching what people are doing in private, but what they are doing in public areas where an individual's right to privacy can reasonably be weighed against the public's need for protection.



An emerging area of potential camera surveillance is through the covert use of cell phone and laptop web cameras. Some cell phones and laptop computers have the ability for remote activation of the integrated camera. This feature is ostensibly to allow the capturing of the image of a thief in the case of a stolen device. Obviously, there is great potential for abuse of this feature if unauthorized persons obtain remote access codes to these types of cameras.

~ K. McMillan, WTI

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