



## Yes, Amazon Is Tracking People

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When most people think of the tech giant Amazon, they think of an innovative, consumer-friendly company responsible for affordable deliveries. Recent news is shattering that image.

According to documents obtained by American Civil Liberties Union affiliates in three states, Amazon is providing police departments in Orlando, Fla., and Washington County, Ore., with powerful facial recognition technology.

The documents show that the company's interests go beyond efficient shopping, and should serve as a reminder not only that police departments ought to be prohibited from using real-time facial recognition technology, but also that most lawmakers have been asleep at the wheel when it comes to the proliferation of surveillance technology. Amazon's facial recognition service, Rekognition, is designed to identify and track people going about their daily business. This isn't hyperbole — a Rekognition spokesperson explicitly mentioned real-time tracking and identification at an Amazon Web Services summit earlier this year. The same spokesperson went on to call Orlando a "smart city," with cameras everywhere that allow authorities to track persons of interest in real time.

Across the country, police have been deploying powerful surveillance tools without informing the public. In one particularly egregious example, police in Baltimore conducted persistent aerial surveillance without informing the mayor, the city council, or public defenders.

It should not be possible for police to deploy powerful surveillance technology without first having a period of public comment during which members of the community can express concerns, and in which police must reveal the technology's capabilities.

Without public oversight of surveillance technology, invasive, persistent, and warrantless surveillance will increasingly become the norm rather than the exception.

Amazon, responding to recent news about Rekognition, issued a statement that read, "Our quality of life would be much worse today if we outlawed new technology because some people could choose to abuse the technology."

True enough, and local lawmakers should be taking steps to limit such abuse. Such limits need not hamper innovation. Facial recognition is an exciting technology with applications beyond law enforcement. Autism treatment, ticket purchasing, retail checkouts, marketing, and health care are only some of the industries and applications facial recognition will surely affect in the coming years. These welcome developments need not come at the expense of our civil liberties.

In order to protect civil liberties without hampering innovation, lawmakers should require public input before surveillance tools are deployed and ensure that facial recognition databases are purged of data related to law-abiding people. After all, half of all American adults are already in a law enforcement facial recognition network, and the vast majority of these adults are not wanted for a serious crime.

Finally, lawmakers should ensure that realtime facial recognition capability is not merged with police cameras, whether they are dash cams, CCTV cameras, or body cameras. Facial recognition may well be a valuable investigatory tool, but outfitting police with real-time facial recognition capability will only increase the likelihood of needlessly contentious and violent confrontations between police officers and members of communities across the country.

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