

Civil libertarians fear use of drones during pandemic will remain part of surveillance state

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April 2, 2020

Technologies used to enforce social distancing and to monitor and curb the spread of the coronavirus need a sunset clause, or they could linger as an intrusive tool of the state, civil libertarians and privacy experts say.

During a natural disaster or war, emergency measures taken by the government usually include a reasonably clear end date when the powers are no longer needed, Julian Sanchez, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, told the *Washington Examiner*.

Coronavirus, much like terrorism, has the potential to spread and resurface, he said. A point of danger is when the persistent threat of resurgence justifies emergency measures as a prophylactic "just in case" measure. "You don't have quite as bright a line with something like coronavirus, which has the potential to become a cyclical problem."

"We want to make sure that we don't end up with permanent changes to our society that shift power in ways that last a lot longer than this virus," said Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst with the ACLU's Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project. "We want to make sure that emergency measures are temporary. Put sunset provisions into things so that they automatically expire."

Data collected by drones can track fever and coughing at a work site or a hospital, providing real-time information that, combined with sensor-collected heart or respiratory measurements, can monitor population health. Drone companies say these tools can act as a crucial early warning system for the virus.

White House public health experts predict a second outbreak of the virus in the fall, one of several 'waves' expected.

Drone manufacturers see opportunities for their technology to help stop the spread of COVID-19, with cameras that monitor physical coronavirus symptoms or loudspeakers urging compliance with stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders.

In Florida, the Daytona Beach Police Department began using drones on Wednesday to enforce compliance with Gov. Ron DeSantis's newly announced stay-at-home measure.

Draganfly CEO Cameron Chell said his company uses sensors to register sensitive physical data from a distance, including a person's heart or respiratory rate, coughing, sneezing, blood pressure, or fever. These are measures that on a cruise ship, a convention center, or at an airport, Chell said, can ensure vacation place or workplace safety. His company is "inundated" with requests from local agencies in "hot spots" looking to urgently implement tools to better control and monitor social distancing. Such tools are likely to be in use within the next 50 days.

Drones are an extreme case of this and other oversight measures, according to Sanchez, who sees potential use for the technology, with limits. Infrared cameras trying to identify individual people who are sick raise a different level of concern than observing an unusual number of people at a work site who seem to have high temperatures, he added.

"If there are a handful of virus cases and you are trying to stop the spread before it's basically ubiquitous, the tools provide very high value," he said.

In the United States, location tracking data is in use by federal agencies, shared by tech companies working with the White House on the pandemic response, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. Analyses of the movement of people in areas of interest come from cellphone data provided by companies that track location data to sell ads.

In Israel, the country's spy agency said their controversial mass surveillance program had identified 500 virus cases that would not have otherwise been found.

"When is the last time you remember a brief suspension of civil liberties?" asked Edward Snowden in an interview last week. Snowden, a former CIA subcontractor charged with violating the Espionage Act after leaking classified National Security Agency information on global surveillance programs, added: "This is the question that everybody should consider. When we see emergency measures passed, particularly today, they tend to be sticky."