

High Tech May be Lowering Crime Rate

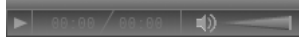
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Every minute a car is stolen. Every day across the country, 44 people are murdered and nearly 3800 are victims of violent crimes.

While crime usually rises during a recession a national crimes report card from the FBI tells us this time it has not. Across the country violent crimes are down 5.5%. Crimes like murder declined 7.2%, robbery 8.1%, motor vehicle theft 17.2%.



The reason why, say law enforcement officials, is the increased use of high tech tools to fight crime.

From a control center that resembles the Starship Enterprise, Chicago city officials keep watch over the 232 square mile urban area with a massive network of cameras, creating a virtual eye in the sky. Officials refuse to give actual figures, but some estimate the number of publicly and privately owned cameras targeting Chicago to be around 15,000.

"You can zoom 32 x optically and up to 184 x digitally," explains Nicholas Beaton, a paramedic with the Chicago Fire Department. Reporter: What does that mean? Can you see that person's license?" "Oh we can get license plates. I'm not going to pull up a specific license plate on there...But yes, you can actually zoom in on very clearly see their license plate," Beaton explains.

Nick Beaton-a city paramedic assigned to the operation center. On the day we were in Chicago, officials were keeping a close eye on crowds gathering for a Tea Party protest.

Reporter: "Can you identify the people who are there? Can you actually pick out faces of those at the demonstration?" "We are very strict on how we use the cameras and protecting privacy," Beaton says. "We never zoom in windows when they are open. We will never look into buildings and we are actually very careful if we zoom in on people's faces specifically.

Jim Harper of the Cato Institute says the problem with surveillance cameras and technology is they have a spotty record of preventing crime. Instead, he says they are an invasion of privacy.

"People in most cities are probably captured on cameras daily, if not multiple times a day," notes Jim Harper with the CATO Institute. "As these cameras network together and they are better capable at recognizing individual faces, people will realize just how they are being watched."

Harper says the danger is when videos are released of individuals who are not actually involved in a crime. Like this video of a man changing his shirt. (right) His picture was broadcast nationally because officials first believed he could be the Times Square bomber.



"There are not absolutes here. The cameras are helpful in some instances. Cameras are harmful in other instances if they've led us astray."

But there is likely to be a demand for even more surveillance cameras. Officials say the solution then is ever more sophisticated equipment that catches criminals in the act. 911 operators in Chicago can turn on any surveillance camera within 150 feet of an emergency call. So when a 911 operator received a call that a Salvation Army bell ringer was helping himself to the collection bucket as seen in this video...the cops were called in.

The brain of the video surveillance system-computer software called "analytics" -it allows operators to set up a virtual perimeter around buildings. As this demonstration shows -- once someone or something crosses that virtual line --- like this man walking out the front door....the computer sends an alert to an operator.

Chicago Police commander John Lewin runs the information services department. "It is looking for a face like object in this image and it clips that out so it says okay that is the image. Chicago has the most advanced surveillance network in the United States, probably the world."

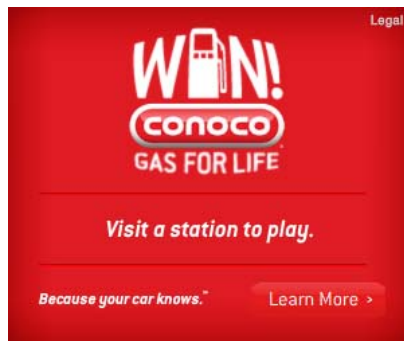
He points to mobile cameras called PODS..police operation devices...which allows officers to watch high crime neighborhoods in real time, which is how they were able to catch a man as he attempted to burglarize a home. And an arsonist after he turned a dumpster ablaze.

Reporter: "Are you concerned that officers are will rely too much on technology and not do the regular foot work?"

"No," Lewin replies. "As with any technology none of these things are the magic bullet pardon the pun. These are tools, these are just, none of them are going to be the solution to the problem. They are just going to be another tool in the toolbox to help officers do their jobs."

The Fourth Amendment protects against unreasonable searches. Americans will soon have to decide when this (security surveillance) goes too far.

(Erin Moriarty, CBS News)



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