

MORE CAMERAS PLANNED

Camera surveillance threatens rights

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ACLU News
[ACLU Northern Calif.]

At a cost of \$39,000, the San Francisco Police Department installed a closed-circuit television camera at the corner of Fifth and Mission Streets last month. This initial camera, if it proves successful, is the planned forerunner of 31 more.

Police sources claim the purpose of the camera is to monitor traffic at the busy intersection and to enable traffic bureau officers to react to traffic problems. However, a police spokesman admitted that the camera will also be used for crime surveillance. He said surveillance is a secondary objective but it will aid police in spotting criminal activity.

Capabilities of the camera do not limit its powers to traffic surveillance. It can look in any direction and is equipped with a zoom lens which can focus on an object 1000 feet away.

"I'm unalterably opposed to these cameras," was the reaction of ACLU-NC General Counsel Paul Halvonik. He charged that "it's another example of the state invading our privacy."

Similar camera systems have been in use elsewhere in the country, some for the express purpose of surveillance. Police officials claim they have been wildly successful in reducing crime but a recent report by the National Lawyers Committee on Civil Liberties claims the real

result is that crime has simply moved to other areas beyond the purview of the camera.

Legal Director Charles Marson stated that the single camera may not be a major threat to civil liberties but the probable long range effects could be very damaging. He cautioned that if there is little opposition to this initial camera, we will be helpless when they increase in numbers and expand in technological capabilities.

Marson explained that the spectre of "Big Brother" will be far more clear when there are more than 30 cameras spread through the city, some in residential areas, and they are equipped with lightmagnification devices, video tape and long range microphones. San Francisco police admit that the camera which is currently in use can be adapted for video tape and sound. He concluded that if such powers are granted to the police, "we must assume they'll use them. I don't trust their will power in avoiding temptation."

ACLU-NC urges citizens of San Francisco to inform their supervisors of their opposition to the expenditure of vast sums of money for expansion of the surveillance system. If no opposition is heard, it will surely expand and the fact that people accept being watched is more anguishing than the fact that the government watches them.