WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT OF VIDEO SURVEILLANCE IN PUBLIC AREAS BY MID-SIZED URBAN AGENCIES BY 2007?

Article

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Introduction

Law enforcement agencies throughout California and the United States are facing a crisis in recruitment and retention while simultaneously fighting an ever-increasing battle to maintain law and order and quality-of-life in their communities. Community Policing and Problem Solving has enabled police departments to be more effective by maintaining close ties with the communities they serve and obtaining input on what the communities’ true interests are as to the services provided by law enforcement agencies. This has led, however, to an increased level of expectation of police agencies on the part of the community, who not only expect their police officers to arrest criminals, but also to work on quality-of-life issues such as graffiti and youth loitering.

Faced with a limited number of staff positions and an increase in demand, law enforcement agencies must be more innovative while meeting community expectations. One possible solution to these challenges is the use of video surveillance of public areas by the police. Controversial in nature, but with the potential for great effectiveness, the use of video surveillance by the police is growing in use but nonetheless is still not widely accepted in the United States.

Project

As part of a future-oriented project undertaken during a recent session of the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Command College, the author has endeavored to gauge the impact of the use of video surveillance on a mid-sized police agency. Hypothetical Mid-sized City has a population of approximately 104,000, and Mid-Sized City Police Department has 120 sworn members.
Using a literature review and a group exercise in futures forecasting, the author developed scenarios depicting possible futures, then constructed a strategic plan based on the scenarios.

**Literature Review**

The research conducted underscored the importance of gaining community acceptance before implementing video surveillance.

In Cincinnati, Ohio, a city councilman obtained over $100,000.00 in private funding to pay for the purchase and installation a 13-camera system. However, he did not anticipate the community’s objection to such video surveillance and was defeated in his bid to install the camera system. Ultimately, he was able to have one camera installed at one intersection.\(^1\)

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the opposite approach was taken when the Milwaukee Common Council passed an ordinance requiring gasoline filling stations that remain open 24 hours a day to install video cameras and keep the videotapes recorded for 72 hours. This also extended to 24-hour convenience stores.\(^2\)

The Security Industry Association published a report in December of 1998 outlining thirty-seven (37) examples of the use of security cameras in the United States, including successful uses in Mount Vernon, New York and Honolulu, Hawaii. In Oakland, California, however, civil liberty concerns delayed the use of video surveillance.\(^3\)

Thomas D. Colbridge noted that controversy surrounding government surveillance is not new, having been addressed as long ago as 1928 when the Supreme
Court addressed the Constitutional issues involved in the government’s recording of telephone calls. Later decisions have confirmed the government’s ability to conduct electronic surveillance but have placed limitations.  

It is clear, however, that if the action taken by a government agency does not infringe upon a reasonable expectation of privacy, it does not constitute a search under the Fourth Amendment. If video surveillance is used in an area where there is not a reasonable expectation of privacy, there are no Fourth Amendment issues to deal with, or warrants to obtain. Furthermore, federal courts have long ruled that there is no expectation of privacy in conversation or activity if one party to that conversation or activity has consented to government monitoring. Therefore, if a government entity wanted to monitor its own facilities via video surveillance, it would become the consenting party and would fulfill this obligation. Colbridge concluded that electronic surveillance is one of the most powerful investigative tools available to law enforcement but acknowledged that as powerful as these techniques are, they are also extremely invasive.

In Europe, video surveillance has long been used in public places by the police, where they aggressively use video surveillance as part of what they refer to as proactive policing. British police cite the reduction of crime and increased public assurance as evidence of the success of video surveillance.

Technology in the field of video surveillance, like most electronic related technology, has taken great strides forward in recent years. The technology involved is not the frame-grabbing technology most of us are familiar with in which three or four frames per second are shown in a jerky, cartoon-like fashion, but rather as an ultra
smooth, high quality image that can depict an event as if it’s being filmed on a high
definition video camera.\textsuperscript{viii}

The development of technology capable of broadcasting such images directly to
officers on patrol in their vehicles over their MDT screens is under development, but
limited by available band width. However, systems using DSL lines or cable are in place
and available and will allow dispatchers or other personnel in police stations to tune in
via a centralized website to many different sites and monitor activities there. They then
may relay the information to responding units. This type of video surveillance enables
agencies to provide better service in life and death situations. Dispatchers can provide
details on the number of suspects, the types of weapons they possess or vehicles being
driven and other information to responding units who can make better decisions with the
more complete information and increase the likelihood of apprehending criminals.\textsuperscript{ix}
A Motorola executive summed it up by saying that the police need certain tools to
accomplish the job and since staffing is always a problem, they are leaning toward a
 technological fix.\textsuperscript{x}
Scenario Development

A diverse group, representing a variety of experience and points of view, was brought together to help forecast future trends and events having an impact on the use of video surveillance. Ten trends were identified: liability associated with video surveillance, level of community acceptance, level of video technology, level of local funding available, level of crime deterrence, level of willingness to sacrifice privacy, level of misuse of video surveillance, amount of maintenance requirements of equipment, level of ability to identify, and number of assaults on police officers in video surveillance areas. Ten events were also identified: recession, terrorist type attack, rape prevented by video surveillance, public surveillance ruled an invasion of privacy, video surveillance ruled inadmissible in court, video surveillance causes increase in public perception of racial profiling, state and federal grants restricted, arrest rates double since implementing cameras, crime dramatically decreased with use of video surveillance, video surveillance provider switches to DVD format after city buys VHS system. Some of these trends and events were used in compiling three scenarios: one optimistic, one pessimistic, and one normative.

Scenario Introduction

Mid-sized City grew over the years from its beginnings as a refuge for 1906 earthquake survivors to a densely populated, culturally diverse community of 104,000 in 2007. With more people came more crime. From street robberies to gang activity to graffiti to aggressive panhandlers, Mid-sized City had a wide range of crime and quality-of-life issues.
Traditional techniques like high visibility motor and foot patrol, along with limited surveillance and community involvement, had only partial effectiveness. City buildings and facilities continued to be plagued by graffiti and other vandalism. Street robberies and gang activity in areas surrounding a major bus stop continued. Merchants in the older business district complained ceaselessly about aggressive panhandlers that patrol officers could never seem to find.

The chief wanted to do more to deal with these issues. He was concerned for the community and often felt the pressure from homeowners’ groups that demanded answers about why these problems persisted. He also realized that hiring significantly more officers was not necessarily the solution, nor was it likely given the cost of personnel and the recruiting challenges faced by the law enforcement profession.

Why not video surveillance? He received catalogs in the mail every month expounding the features of cameras and VCRs. He soon learned that there were companies that would transmit video images of locations over the Internet. A person could check on their home or business from anywhere with an Internet connection.

It so happened that the city’s parks and recreation department was in the planning stages for a new community center at Washington Park where a lot of the graffiti and gang problems had occurred over the years. A deal was struck with the parks and recreation director that cameras covering the inside and outside of the building would be incorporated into the design. This would enable the dispatchers or front desk personnel at the station to “log on” and monitor the center for illegal activity. Now he had a foothold on the issue, and could see where it would lead.
Optimistic Ending

The press conference had been a huge success. The TV folks had just played the chief’s voice over the video showing the two young thugs forcing the young mother into Washington Park, tearing at her clothes and obviously intending to commit rape and God-knew-what-else against her. Fortunately, Police Cadet Wiley Clem, who was monitoring Washington Park along with the city’s numerous other facilities via Mid-sized City’s elaborate video system, saw this from the beginning. A quick phone call to dispatch and an equally quick radio call to all units resulted in two arrests and an uninjured victim.

The video clearly showed the arrival of the radio cars and quick action by the officers. The praise for the video system was widespread, and even the ACLU had to admit grudgingly that the two thugs had no right to accost innocent women in the park.

In the year since the video system had been implemented, over fifty documented incidents of littering, loitering, illegal drinking and curfew violations had been detected and dealt with as a result of being observed by department staff. Graffiti and burglaries had dropped off to nothing. The prevented rape was exactly what the chief needed to convince the city council to allow him to begin installation at additional high-activity locations, and to overcome what remained of any resistance from some members of the homeowners and merchants groups who had been surveyed before the project was implemented. Technology was truly his friend in 2007.

Pessimistic Ending
The chief hung up the phone and began massaging his temples to alleviate the migraine he already felt coming on, one of many he had experienced in 2007. He cursed under his breath, and wondered what it would take to get a little cooperation from someone on this video monitoring project. The idea was sound, the equipment was in place and functioning, so why was the city manager calling to politely, but pointedly, ask him why no one had noticed the vast amount of graffiti spray painted on the building at Washington Park the previous night? The parks employee who opened the building had called to report it the first thing in the morning, and the beat officer dutifully took the report, then headed for the station to check the videotape he was sure would reveal the identity of the suspects.

The officer soon found that the 960-hour VCR machine was functioning perfectly, except for the minor matter of someone forgetting to change the tape a day earlier. No one had noticed the blinking light or heard the faint beeping of the alarm indicating that the tape had run out.

Why no one had seen the incident unfold on the monitors was unknown. The dispatchers said they were too busy to check the monitors. The desk officer was “swamped” with people needing tow releases all night and didn’t notice anything. The watch commander forgot to log on because she was busy approving reports all night.

The chief knew that all it would take would be one incident where an arrest was made or a crime was prevented at Washington Park and he could convince the city council to allow him to install monitoring equipment at all of the city facilities. Instead, he had been “burned.” And he hadn’t even had time to return the call from the ACLU about the cameras yet. He wished he had listened to those who had warned him to meet
with members of the community, including the ACLU, in order to get their input on the project. Doing so would have saved him more headaches.

Normative Ending

The chief was satisfied with the meeting. He had called in the patrol lieutenants and captain to discuss the video monitoring project. The first year, 2007, had been generally successful, but as always, things needed to be fine-tuned.

Changing the tapes was always a challenge, but a system of checks and balances was worked out so they would run out of tape far less often. There had been times when no one was monitoring due to sick calls or staff shortages, but the hodge-podge of cadets, explorers, citizen volunteers and light duty officers they had used to do the monitoring had worked out pretty well. There had been a couple of times when they had missed groups of kids drinking in the park, and a game of “keep-away” had been mistaken for a fight, but there had been arrests made and crimes prevented as well.

Everyone agreed to work on the issues. Lt. Stone was still miffed that they were even involved in something like this, saying that the money should be spent for more cops. Even the lieutenant couldn’t argue with the results. The chief felt that the results were good enough to approach the city council about expanding the program to include all the city parks and facilities, not just Washington Park. Of course, since the grant funding they had been using for the project had just dried up, they would have to use local funds. The new DVD format was much more expensive than the VHS equipment they had started out with. And many of the community members who had objected to the
project during stakeholder meetings were still not totally convinced that it was worthwhile. Oh, well, nothing worth doing is ever easy, not even in the year 2007.

**Strategic Plan**

The video surveillance of public areas by a mid-sized police department will impact that agency in many areas. These areas are the cost of obtaining and maintaining the technology, the issues surrounding privacy and community acceptance, and the effectiveness of the technology on the reduction of crime and the ability to address quality-of-life issues. The strategic plan will attempt to identify and find ways to assist mid-sized police agencies in planning for the use of video surveillance of public areas, with an eye toward bringing a normative scenario to the present.

**Vision/Goals/Objectives**

The vision entailed in a normative scenario is one of a limited implementation of video surveillance in public areas believed to present a high likelihood of success as related to the amount of crime and quality-of-life issues present. If successful, further installation in other appropriate areas would take place.

**Organization Analysis**

A strategic plan is developed based on the evaluation and analysis of the present situation. An objective inventory and assessment of an organization’s strengths and
weaknesses needs to be conducted. This analysis, commonly known as a SWOT or WOTS UP, identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats an agency is presented with. This analysis is a general overview of mid-sized agencies and is not agency specific.

Strengths

- Agency members are becoming more adept at using technology.
- Technology that exists in mid-sized agencies can be adapted to work with video surveillance.
- Growing concern for quality-of-life issues coupled with staffing shortages may force agencies to consider the use of video surveillance.

Weaknesses

- Staff shortages in mid-sized agencies extend to civilian personnel likely to be charged with monitoring premises monitored by video surveillance.
- The cost of maintaining equipment purchased through grant funding is not covered by the grants and would fall upon local agencies.
- Resistance by police union members who view implementation as a threat to job security.

Opportunities

- Video surveillance is commonplace in the private sector.
- Technology is rapidly advancing and readily available.
• Grant funding is currently plentiful and available for the purchase of technology.
• The World Trade Center disaster has raised anxiety and caused a reevaluation of privacy and profiling issues.

Threats

• Lawsuits by private attorneys or ACLU over privacy issues loom.
• Loss of credibility with or support of the community if implemented without their input and approval.

Stakeholder Identification

Stakeholders are individuals or groups impacted by what we do or who can impact what we do are stakeholders. The interaction of stakeholders with the mid-sized agency must be examined as part of the strategic plan. There are many stakeholders involved with this issue. Among them are:

Community members: While many of them may conduct their activities with little knowledge or concern for the technology being used, others will find it a serious intrusion into their privacy.

The city council: They represent the community, and will be faced with the decision to balance community safety with community concern for privacy. As elected officials, they must represent the will of the people while at the same time recognizing the need for effective police protection utilizing all available avenues. They will be especially interested in issues surrounding what facilities have cameras installed, and the community reaction to the use of video surveillance.
The city manager: The city manager will have concerns similar to those of the council but will focus more on the cost effectiveness of such technology and the ability to expand the capabilities of the mid-sized agency through its use.

The members of the mid-sized agency: Their job could be made easier through the use of video surveillance by enabling them to focus on areas that are not equipped with it and then responding to reports passed onto them by those monitoring the video areas. Their effectiveness in responding to such calls will be enhanced through the availability of better descriptions of perpetrators and their activities. The rank and file members, however, may feel threatened and feel that this technology may supplant future job positions by eliminating or reducing the need for the human factor as the technology available becomes more sophisticated and widely available. Management staff will no doubt be concerned with the cost of obtaining and maintaining the equipment, selecting the correct location for its installation and dealing with the rank and file concerns with the issue.

Non-law-abiding members of the community: This group will be concerned that the use of video surveillance will curtail their ability to commit crimes, loiter, or otherwise conduct their “business” unfettered by interference. They may retaliate by vandalizing equipment, and by filing lawsuits against agencies using video surveillance.

Public officials: The buildings or parks they are responsible for would be the subject of video surveillance will expect to be consulted as to where cameras are placed and will want to be kept apprised of results.
Information technologists or other technology-related staff: They will expect to have input on the type of equipment selected and will be concerned with the amount of added workload entailed by the maintenance of the equipment.

District attorneys and defense attorneys: They will expect that the mid-sized agency carefully preserve tapes of incidents monitored that result in arrests, and will be sensitive to any overly intrusive use of video surveillance.

**Snaildarters**

Snaildarters are unexpected complications or missed details that can complicate or interfere with the completion of projects. Two potential snaildarters are possible. Both are connected to the acquisition of the video surveillance equipment:

The bid process necessary for acquiring the equipment can be cumbersome and subject to misinterpretation. It can sometimes result that a vendor winning the bid is situated out of the immediate area and thus is not readily available for repairs or additional work needed.

The sustainability and reliability of vendors is a related problem. Some vendors are operating on the edge and are subject to going out of business unexpectedly, leaving the mid-sized agency with the headache of trying to salvage the project.

**Strategy Development**

When formulating the strategic plan surrounding this issue, it is important to be mindful of the ultimate goal of the use of video surveillance of public areas, which is to provide more effective and better quality service to the community that the mid-sized
agency serves. This factor alone provides the guidance necessary to begin to formulate the strategy necessary to be successful. Specific strategies are:

Cost of obtaining and maintaining technology

Mid-sized agencies must use available grant funding to purchase a system which will best fit their needs. Grant managers within these agencies must be mindful of any limitations placed on the grant funds by the state or federal legislature and avoid violating the grant parameters to protect themselves from possible punitive action or loss of future grant funding. Once a useable source is identified and the equipment is purchased, local funds must be budgeted to provide for the maintenance of the system and for any future upgrades, repairs or additions.

Training of personnel

Training in the use of the video technology equipment is also a cost that must be born by the local agency. While most employees are familiar with computer operation and Internet access, specific training on the use of whatever system is implemented must be provided on an ongoing basis to ensure the utmost in effectiveness.

Union issues

Police officer associations may take issue with the fact that jobs may be lost to technology. Law enforcement executives must meet with union officials to talk through this issue and provide assurance that video surveillance is an additional tool meant to increase officer safety and effectiveness, not an effort to reduce staff.
Community buy-in

Management staff of mid-sized agencies must ensure community buy-in to the use of video surveillance technology by meeting with these stakeholders, explaining how, when and where the technology will be utilized, and acting on community input to minimize the amount of anxiety or frustration felt by community members who may oppose this technology. Mid-sized agencies should consider making some of the video sent over the Internet accessible to community members on websites to help overcome the Big Brother aspect of the issue.

Adverse parties

Mid-sized agencies can use those who are the critics of the agency’s ability to deal with quality-of-life or crime issues to act as catalysts for the use of video surveillance technology by showing them examples of how it has been effective in other jurisdictions and gaining their buy-in for its implementation.

Transition management

Deciding on what to change is usually much easier than the actual implementation of change. Positive steps must be taken to insure that the plans are not just mere documents that gather dust. Using focused transition management techniques can help insure success.
Commitment Planning

A commitment plan is a strategy, described in a series of action steps, devised to secure the support of subsystems vital to the change effort taking place.

The first step is to identify groups or individuals whose commitment is needed to affect the change. These can be slightly different than the stakeholders in some cases. These individuals or groups represent the critical mass, whose active commitment is necessary if the change is to occur.¹

In the case of video surveillance of public areas, the critical mass is made up of the community, public officials and those who are responsible for the public buildings or areas to be kept under video surveillance. In order to gain their commitment, they must be briefed on the nature of the video surveillance, the capabilities of the technology and the particular ways in which they as individuals can support the use of video. Meetings and briefings must make it clear that the video technology is not a panacea or cure-all, merely another tool for law enforcement to expand its capabilities to protect the public safety. Some emphasis should be given to the fact that technology can sometimes fail or be misused, and assurances must be made that the mid-sized agency will do everything possible to maintain the system so it is ready when needed, and policies will be in place to guard against the misuse of any information obtained through the use of video surveillance.
Implementation

Careful consideration must be given to purchasing the right system that will provide the most effective use of video surveillance. Once identified and purchased, the system must be installed in areas selected to give the maximum impact as far as anticipated results. In other words, high activity locations where there is a high likelihood of detecting crime or quality-of-life issues that can be successfully dealt with should be selected first in order to build the credibility of the technology and its use. Other locations can be brought online later in the process.

Training of personnel using the equipment to monitor areas is paramount and should be thorough. Once again, staff must be convinced that this technology is not meant to replace existing personnel or preclude the addition of more personnel in the future, but only to provide another tool with which the mid-sized agency can more effectively serve their community.

The mid-sized agency must identify who will be responsible for implementing the change. They are the ones who will shape, enable and orchestrate a successful change to the use of video technology. They may serve at any rank or position but will be keys in the process.

Organizational commitment must be given to the use of video surveillance in order for it to be successful. Individuals and groups such as police management, police unions, technological experts and others must be brought on board to create a high likelihood of successful change.
Honest communication and involvement by all levels will help ensure success. Policies pertaining to the change must be clear and concise, describe where the agency is in the present and where it wants to go in the future, identify those who will implement and be affected by the change and address some of the negative aspects that could result from the use of video surveillance. Above all, the chief executive’s commitment must be clear and constant.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation of the progress of the change implemented can be monitored by gathering continuous feedback from the critical mass and others in the form of anecdotal input and statistics. With video surveillance, numbers of arrests or field interrogations resulting from monitored activity can be tracked, along with numbers of complaints received. Problems with the equipment can be logged to evaluate its quality and durability.

A project manager must be identified who will conduct the ongoing evaluation once the change has been implemented.
Project Summary

Law enforcement needs to recognize the necessity to use all available legal means to provide for community safety. This would, of course, include the use of video surveillance of public areas. Leadership cannot shy away from the use of such technology in the face of the many challenges involved.

Police management, especially chief executives, must be prepared to stand fast in their efforts to use video surveillance technology in the face of criticism or attacks. They must also be patient during the initial implementation phases if the technology fails or is difficult to bring online. They must provide constant reassurance to their officers that the technology exists for their benefit in providing effective service to the community, and not to supplant their jobs at any point in time.

Budgetary Implications

At the present time, video surveillance technology can be obtained through grant funding, but there is no guarantee this funding will continue at the level that law enforcement has become accustomed to in the past five years. Once this grant funding runs out or is unavailable for the purchase of such technology, law enforcement leadership must be prepared to convince city managers and city councils that local funds need to be used to purchase and maintain the technology.

While not as expensive as some other items presently purchased and maintained by local agencies, the video technology is nonetheless an item that may fall by the wayside given the other priorities of a municipality, some of whom may be faced with a shrinking budget due to the state energy crisis and other factors.
Whether grant funding or local funding is used for the purchase of the technology, the maintenance of it will undoubtedly fall on the shoulders of local agencies who must plan for this as part of budgetary implications.

The cost of implementing video surveillance technology is outweighed by its potential benefit in the prevention of property crimes such as graffiti and vandalism which exact untold fiscal impact on cities across the country every year. And no monetary cost can be placed on the potential for video technology to save lives in certain circumstances.

**Recommendations and Conclusions**

The implementation of video surveillance of public areas should be undertaken quickly by those agencies not yet availing themselves of this advantage. The implementation should be done in a measured, studied manner starting in locations that have been high on the list of community concern.

Agencies must choose the right technology for the job by assembling a committee consisting of management staff, line officers, technology experts, citizens, media and other stakeholders who will be charged with formulating a plan for selecting the location and manner of use, the technology to be implemented and the policies under which that technology will be used.

Inclusion of stakeholders in the planning process is a key step. Providing a clear explanation of the nature and intent of the use of video surveillance should clear up any misconceptions. Careful listening to the concerns of the stakeholders involved will help guide the use of the technology in such a way to insure its success. Resistance can be
overcome with patience, persistence, and facts presented in a rational and consistent manner.

The impact of the use of video surveillance of public areas by mid-sized agencies can be significantly positive if implemented as described, enabling communities everywhere to enjoy a safer, more pleasant lifestyle at minimal expense.


Endnotes


v Ibid.

vi Ibid.


ix Ibid.

x Ibid.