

MPDC FACT SHEET



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USE OF CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION (CCTV) TO FIGHT CRIME IN DC NEIGHBORHOODS

In August 2006, the Metropolitan Police Department began deploying Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras that are designed to help combat crime in District of Columbia neighborhoods. Following are some Frequently Asked Questions (and answers) about the new CCTV camera deployment:

Q. I thought the MPD already had CCTV cameras. What is different about these cameras?

A. Since the year 2000, the MPD has used a network of CCTV cameras to monitor only the downtown DC area and only during major events in the city (such as large marches, parades and celebrations) or during periods of heightened alert for terrorism. Until now, the MPD has not been authorized to use CCTV cameras in District neighborhoods as a means to deter and investigate criminal activity. The new cameras have been installed in neighborhood settings for the express purpose of crime detection and prevention.

Q. Who authorized the use of CCTV cameras in DC neighborhoods?

A. The use of CCTV cameras to help fight crime in DC neighborhoods is permitted under the Enhanced Crime Prevention and Abatement Emergency Amendment Act of 2006. This emergency legislation was approved by the DC Council on July 19, 2006, and signed into law by Mayor Anthony A. Williams on July 21.

Q. How many neighborhood cameras is the MPD deploying, and when will they be installed?

A. As of March 2007, the MPD has deployed 48 CCTV cameras. Now, the MPD is deploying the second phase of CCTV cameras in District neighborhoods to fight crime. The number of cameras to be deployed has not been finalized.

Q. How are camera locations selected?

A. In selecting possible locations for CCTV cameras, the Chief of Police is required by law to consider data on calls for police service, reported crimes and other public safety indicators, as well as recommendations from Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and civic or citizen associations. The legislation also requires MPD to give consideration to public housing in Hot Spot areas. Once potential sites are identified, technicians must then survey those locations to ensure that CCTV cameras can be installed and operated in those particular areas. In addition, the MPD will consult with the affected Ward Councilmember and Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner before installing any camera.

Q. How can the community make suggestions about where cameras should be used?

A. Residents, Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, and other civic or citizen associations should submit suggestions for camera placement, in writing, to the Commander of the relevant police district. In making recommendations, communities should consider areas where serious or persistent crime is occurring on public space.

Q. Does the MPD notify the public when cameras are deployed and where they are located?

A. Yes. Unless there are exigent circumstances that require immediate deployment without advance public notice, the MPD announces all CCTV camera locations through news releases and postings on the MPDC website. In addition, signs notifying the public that a location may be monitored by CCTV are posted in the affected areas.

Q. How will CCTV be used?

Once CCTV cameras are installed and activated, the MPD plans to use what is called “passive monitoring” of the cameras. In other words, MPD members generally will not be watching the camera images in real time, as the images are being captured. Rather, the images will be captured and recorded, then used by the police to investigate and solve crimes if criminal activity is reported in the areas where the cameras are situated.

Q. How long will CCTV recordings be maintained?

A. Generally, video recordings are indexed and maintained by the MPD for 10 days. If the MPD knows that any recordings contain evidence of criminal activity or an occurrence that may subject the Department to civil liability, the recordings are maintained until final disposition of the case.

Q. Do the CCTV cameras have audio overhear capabilities?

A. No. CCTV cameras are not equipped with audio overhear or recording capabilities. The MPD will not use any type of audio system in conjunction with CCTV cameras unless appropriate court orders are obtained.

Q. Will the cameras be used to see into homes or other buildings?

A. No. CCTV cameras observe public spaces only, where the courts have held there is no reasonable expectation of privacy.

Q. What safeguards are in place to prevent the inappropriate use of CCTV cameras?

A. Most existing policies and procedures governing the MPD’s use of CCTV cameras apply to the new neighborhood-based cameras as well. Arbitrary or discriminatory use of the cameras to track individuals, or to focus on hand bills, flyers or other materials distributed or carried pursuant to the First Amendment, is expressly prohibited by policy and regulation. Violations could result in disciplinary action against MPD members.

Q. Are the camera placements permanent?

A. No. The Department is using tactical cameras that can be moved periodically. Crime around each camera location will be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. If crime patterns shift, the MPD can move the cameras to new locations.

Q. How long will the neighborhood CCTV cameras be in place?

A. In July 2006, the Mayor and City Council passed legislation that authorized the MPD to use CCTV cameras in District neighborhoods to fight crime. Also, the legislation required the MPD to submit an annual CCTV report, which includes a long term plan for CCTV and its effectiveness in reducing crime.

Q. Where can I get more information about the MPD’s use of CCTV?

A. Detailed information is available on the MPD’s website at www.mpdc.dc.gov/cctv.

