

Surveillance Cameras in Public Places and Civil Liberties

In February, the City of Seattle installed video cameras at Cal Anderson Park. The cameras record video that later can be monitored by police and others. They can also be moved, zoomed and watched live by police after a crime or illegal activity is reported, and on other occasions. The Seattle City Council in June approved an \$850,000 pilot program to install a dozen surveillance cameras in four parks. As the ACLU had urged, the council required that an audit of the cameras' effectiveness be conducted after 21 months.

- In a free and open society, people should be able to use parks and other public spaces **without the government recording their activities**.
- What surveillance cameras overwhelmingly capture are the **innocent activities of law-abiding citizens**.
- Research by the ACLU and others has shown that public **surveillance cameras do not prevent crime**, they simply move it elsewhere, outside the eyes of the cameras.
- Other, **more effective alternatives exist** to deal with concerns about crime, including improved lighting and increased police presence.
- Cameras that are installed for one purpose – say, looking for crime in public areas – **can later be used for other purposes** – say, tracking participants in political rallies or even peering into people's homes.
- Great Britain now has more than four million public cameras. In London, the average person is now captured on video camera **300 times a day**.

What You Can Do

- Learn more about cameras in public places and the growing Surveillance Society. Read the ACLU report "Under the Watchful Eye" (www.aclunc.org).
- Let the mayor and city council members know that you expect a serious and objective evaluation of the impacts of surveillance cameras.



www.aclu-wa.org