CHAPTER 13

CLOSED-CIRCUIT TELEVISION SURVEILLANCE*

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INTRODUCTION

Closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance cameras serve many functions and are used in both public and private settings. The prevention of personal and property crime is among its primary objectives. As an intervention targeted at crime, CCTV is a type of situational crime prevention (Clarke, 1995). According to Clarke and Homel’s (1997) classification of situational crime prevention, CCTV is viewed as a technique of “formal surveillance.” In this regard, CCTV cameras are seen to enhance or take the place of security personnel.

The mechanisms by which CCTV may prevent crime are numerous. These have been articulated by Armitage et al. (1999:226–227), and the main ones are as follows:

- Caught in the act – perpetrators will be detected and possibly removed or deterred.
- You’ve been framed – CCTV deters potential offenders who perceive an elevated risk of apprehension.
- Nosy Parker – CCTV may lead more people to feel able to frequent the surveilled places. This will increase the extent of natural surveillance by newcomers, which may deter potential offenders.
- Effective deployment – CCTV directs security personnel to ambiguous situations, which may head off their translation into crime.
- Publicity – CCTV could symbolize efforts to take crime seriously, and the perception of those efforts may both energize law-abiding citizens and/or deter crime.
- Time for crime – CCTV may be perceived as reducing the time available to commit crime, preventing those crimes that require extended time and effort.
- Memory jogging – the presence of CCTV may induce people to take elementary security precautions, such as locking their car, by jogging their memory.

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• Anticipated shaming – the presence of CCTV may induce people to take elementary security precautions for fear that they will be shamed by being shown on CCTV.

• Appeal to the cautious – cautious people migrate to the areas with CCTV to shop, leave their cars, and so on. Their caution and security mindedness reduce the risk.

On the other hand, CCTV may cause reported and actual crime to increase. For example, CCTV may encourage increased reporting to police and recording by police. The presence of CCTV may give people a false sense of security and cause them to stop taking precautions that they would have taken in the absence of this intervention, such as not wearing jewelry or walking in groups when out at night. It may also cause crime to be displaced to other locations, times, or victims.

This chapter reports on the findings of a systematic review – incorporating meta-analytic techniques – of the highest quality available research evidence on the effects of CCTV on crime.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been a tremendous growth in the use of CCTV to prevent crime in public space, especially in Britain (Norris and Armstrong, 1999) and, to a much lesser extent, in the U.S. (Nieto, 1997). In Britain, CCTV has been and continues to be the single most heavily funded non-criminal justice crime prevention measure. Over the three-year period of 1999 through 2001, the British government made available £170 million (approximately $250 million) for “CCTV schemes in town and city centres, car parks, crime hot-spots and residential areas” (Home Office Policing and Reducing Crime Unit, 2001:8). In previous years (1996 through 1998), CCTV accounted for more than three-quarters of total spending on crime prevention by the British Home Office (Koch, 1998). According to a recent report, the number of surveillance cameras in England and Wales has increased from 100 in 1990, to 400 in 1994, to 5,200 in 1997, to 40,000 in 2002 (Armitage, 2002).

During this time there has been much debate about the effectiveness of CCTV to prevent crime and hence, on the wisdom of spending such large sums of money. A key issue is how far funding for CCTV in Britain has been based on high quality scientific evidence demonstrating its efficacy in preventing crime. There is concern that this funding has been based partly on a handful of apparently successful schemes that were usually evaluated using simple one group (no control group) before-after designs, done with varying degrees of competence (Armitage et al., 1999), and done with varying degrees of professional independence from the Home Office (Ditton and Short, 1999). Recent reviews that have examined the effectiveness of CCTV in preventing crime (Eck, 1997; 2002; Phillips, 1999) have also noted the need for higher quality, independent evaluation research.