



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 4, 2020

Fever-detecting Drones and Other Intrusive Practices Grow Under COVID-19

Fever-reading drones, thermal cameras, and other coronavirus policies are part of “a looming wave of intrusive technology and constitutionally questionable measures pushed by governments — from local to state to federal — under the mission of protecting a fearful community,” reports the [Miami Herald](#).

As bad as state and local lockdowns have been, the means of enforcing them are even worse. Not content merely to rely on busybodies to [report violators](#), governments are violating people’s privacy in both low- and high-tech ways, and only strong resistance is keeping them from turning much of America into a surveillance state.



On the low-tech end of the spectrum lie reporting requirements. Local boards of health in several states began sharing with first responders the [addresses of individuals known to have contracted COVID-19](#), allegedly “to ensure effective and continued operation of public health and safety services,” as Massachusetts Department of Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel [put it](#).

“It seems kind of intrusive. It’s private health information that is going to be shared and stored. It’s sort of like what’s happening in China,” Caleb Kruckenberg of the New Civil Liberties Alliance (NCLA) told the *Herald*. “I’m worried they’re going to say things like stay home. Or you have to stay home or you’re subject to arrest.”

Those worries are well-founded. “Chinese who don’t agree to constant surveillance are forced to lock down in their homes, or face arrest,” notes the paper. In France, people have to [carry papers](#) proving they have permission to be in a public place. And even in America, people are subject to arrest for such activities as [surfing](#), [taking their kids to the playground](#), or [attending house parties](#).

Kansas City, Missouri, has taken reporting requirements to yet another level, requiring “nonessential” businesses and churches, as a condition of reopening, to [keep lists of names and contact information](#) for people who enter their premises, supposedly so the city health department can respond quickly to reports of coronavirus outbreaks.

The intrusiveness of these mandates, however, is nothing compared to privacy-invading technologies governments have employed — or attempted to employ — during the COVID-19 panic.

The cities of Daytona Beach, Florida, and Westport, Connecticut, both proudly announced that they would be flying drones that were capable of taking a person’s temperature — and thus giving a preliminary indication that the individual had COVID-19 — from hundreds of feet in the air.

“If I zoom in on a crowd of people and ... everybody was 98.6 degrees ... and somebody has a 102 fever,



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he would be red in a crowd of orange people,” Sergeant Tim Ehrenfauker told the [Daytona Beach News-Journal](#).

Moreover, writes the *Herald*, “Draganfly, the Canadian company that built the drone, offered literature that said the technology could also take heart and respiratory rates, find people sneezing and coughing in crowds and detect ‘infectious conditions from a distance of 190 feet.’”

Pressure from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Connecticut caused Westport to scuttle its plan entirely. After the NCLA threatened a lawsuit, Daytona Beach police claimed that while they were flying the drones, they weren’t using the temperature data for COVID-19 monitoring. Southern Florida law-enforcement agencies offered similar assurances when contacted by the *Herald*.

Governments are also using cameras to monitor compliance with their coronavirus dictates. According to the [BBC](#), Cannes, France, has cameras in outdoor markets and buses that “include an automatic alert to city authorities and police where breaches of the mask and distancing rules are spotted,” though allegedly no facial recognition or data storage — and that’s under the city’s *relaxed* virus rules. The Miami criminal courthouse has installed cameras that can detect individuals’ body temperatures.

Kara Gross, legislative director of the ACLU of Florida, told the *Herald* she’s concerned “that private companies looking to turn a profit may keep pushing technologies that would allow governments to more easily monitor citizens for a host of reasons.” She also pointed out that crises, whether real or imagined, are often used by governments to expand their power at the expense of their citizens’ liberties.

In short, the surveillance state, already well under way before the arrival of COVID-19, is now growing even faster. Perhaps now more than ever before, [eternal vigilance is the price of liberty](#).



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