



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 2, 2011

“Intellistreets” Street Lights: Big Brother Intrusion

When Ben Franklin declared, “Those who would give up essential Liberty to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety,” he wisely predicted that the American people would often be prone to willingly forego their rights for so-called protection from the federal government. The clearest example of that has been with the inception of the PATRIOT Act, which has garnered a surprising level of support from the majority of Americans; however, there are a number of local examples of that exchange of liberty for safety as well. The most recent example can be found in cities across the country: high tech street lights which act as surveillance cameras as well as display signs.



Produced by Illuminating Concepts, the “[Intellistreets](#)” feature motion sensors and video surveillance, and are composed of a “wireless digital infrastructure that allows them to be controlled remotely by means of a ubiquitous wi-fi link and a miniature computer housed inside each street light, allowing for ‘security, energy management, data harvesting and digital media,’” [reports](#) Prison Planet.

The devices are also set to aid the Department of Homeland Security by displaying “security announcements.” CBS Detroit [reports](#), “The signs can be programmed by authorities to show any message — a civic welcome, directions to parking for festivals or farmer’s markets, maps, pretty much anything the imagination can conceive. In emergencies, they can also post pictures of children being sought in Amber Alerts or the location of toxic chemical releases or the paths of tornadoes (and more importantly, how to stay away from those dangerous areas).”

Intellistreets went live last week on a 10-mile stretch of road in Farmington Hills, Michigan, which served as the official testing area for the brand-new surveillance equipment. The devices were dedicated in a ceremony attended by U.S. Rep. Gary Peters (D-Mich.).

Illuminating Concepts posted a YouTube video boasting the capabilities of the special street lights, including “energy conservation, homeland security, public safety, traffic control, advertising, [and] video surveillance.”

The video likely does little to assuage concerns regarding the intrusive equipment, however, as it includes disorienting footage of the street lights being used to transmit security alerts such as “Pay attention, please — please stand by for a public safety announcement,” and “This is a security alert.”

According to Prison Planet, such devices are becoming widespread in Europe:

Using street lights as surveillance tools has already been advanced by several European countries. In 2007, [leaked documents out of the UK Home Office](#) revealed that British authorities were working on proposals to fit lamp posts with CCTV cameras that would X-ray scan passers-by



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and “undress them” in order to “trap terror suspects.”

[Dutch police also announced last year](#) that they are developing a mobile scanner that will “see through people’s clothing and look for concealed weapons.”

Reports indicate that UK cities such as Middlesborough have already installed surveillance cameras which even use a speaker system to reprimand people when they commit minor offenses such as littering — intoning, “We are watching you.” Critics have noted the chilling similarity to the words about the government in George Orwell's classic novel *1984*: “Big Brother Is Watching You.”

Unsurprisingly, a number of analysts are pointing to the street surveillance system as further proof that the United States is morphing into an advanced police state, where TSA agents are permitted to grope law-abiding citizens without just cause, and the government may hijack radio and television broadcasts for the purpose of transmitting “emergency alerts.”

Illuminating Concepts attempted to shake off these criticisms in a [press release](#):

Those crying foul over our Intellistreets lighting, security and information system seem to have two consistent qualities: they know little if nothing about the overwhelming merits of our potentially life-saving technology; and, everything they ever learned they learned from the “Big Brother” movies.

What the Intellistreets system is designed to do is simply make our streets safer, more energy efficient and smarter, while being informative and entertaining...

That's why we proudly reached out to the Department of Homeland Security to share our technology. DHS needs American entrepreneurs to develop the technologies that can better keep our citizens safe. Importantly, DHS is intrigued by Intellistreets' potential. They see the tremendous opportunity to add a level of safety and security into our public environments utilizing infrastructure that already exists.

Illuminating Concepts owner Ron Harwood also dismissed critics, stating, “The irony is, the first, most important part of this system is to save energy. Its electronics are so smart that it can create light only as needed.” He called Intellistreets overall “a nonpolitical, life-saving, energy-saving invention.”

Last week, ABC News reported that Harwood was “working with Homeland Security” to implement the network. Harwood also told the *Detroit Free Press* that the lights were a prime example of how “business and government can work together for economic, environmental and social benefits.”

Constitutionalists, however, note that the surveillance street lights — like the PATRIOT Act and the TSA's intrusive screening procedures — directly violate (or severely challenge, depending on each circumstance) the [Fourth Amendment](#), which guards against unreasonable [searches and seizures](#), along with requiring any [warrant](#) to be judicially sanctioned and supported by [probable cause](#). Prison Planet's Paul Joseph Watson declares, they “represent a whole new level in America’s transformation into a high-tech police state.”

In fact, the public backlash against the Intellistreets was so severe that Illuminating Concepts was forced to pull some of its early promotional videos, provoking even further negative reactions from the public.



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