



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on February 10, 2011

Mayor Defends Chicago's Widespread Camera Surveillance

CBSChicago.com reported on Feb. 8 that Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley is defending the city's use of surveillance cameras. On Tuesday, the Mayor rejected the demands of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which had called for the city to stop adding cameras to its network.

The advocacy group had asked that authorities be required to have probable cause to "zoom in" on people, stating that it's an invasion of privacy. Daley replied that it would be impractical to ask a judge to find probable cause before zooming in:



[Call] a judge who's sleeping tonight, at 2 o'clock in the morning, and say "Judge, we have probable cause, the person is walking down 22nd Street." By the time we get there the person's already at Halsted Street.

The ACLU claims that the surveillance tactics use facial recognition and tracking of a person's movement, but the city's Office of Emergency Management denied the use of facial recognition software, saying that the cameras track only objects, not people. The OEM statement did not explain how objects could be tracked without tracking people.

On February 9 [redOrbit](#) reported that Chicago is the "most-watched" U.S. city in terms of surveillance cameras, and the widespread system is generating concerns among the city's residents. [Michael Chertoff](#), former Secretary of U.S. Homeland Security, observed, "I don't think there is another city in the U.S. that has [as] extensive and integrated [a] camera network as Chicago has." Chicago has linked up more than 10,000 public and privately owned surveillance cameras in a system dubbed Operation Virtual Shield.

The ACLU of Illinois issued a [report](#) on the city's 10,000 cameras, operated by police, public transportation systems and private businesses linked to the 911 Center. Harvey Grossman, Legal Director of the group, commented on the surveillance system's potential for wrongful conduct, stressing the need for regulation. He asserted that it raises privacy concerns:

Chicago's camera network invades the freedom to be anonymous in public places, a key aspect of the fundamental American right to be left alone. Each of us then will wonder whether the government is watching and recording us when we walk into a psychiatrist's office, a reproductive health care center, a political meeting, a theater performance, or a bookstore.

Though the ACLU wants a full review of the city's system of both visible and unmarked cameras — claiming a right to the information as taxpayers have funded the measure — city officials have declined to divulge any details. One nearby suburb chipped in \$580,000 for its cameras, a hefty sum in an economy that needs jobs.

Daley observed that it's a cost-effective way to fight crime and has helped authorities respond more quickly and make more arrests. The city's system is composed of different kinds of cameras, and some



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are concentrated in high-crime areas; the public has complained, however, that criminals have simply transferred their activities to side streets that are not surveilled.

Daley continued with his defense, stressing, "We're not spying on anybody. This is the public way. ... We're not spying on anyone or identifying anyone, or racially profiling anyone. We're not."

But the ACLU report states that "Mayor Daley has announced a plan to place a camera 'on every corner' of the City. In the words of another top City official, the objective is to "cover one end of the city to the other."

The group comments that there has been little research showing that the cameras deter crime, and suggests that the money could be better spent on filling some of the 1000 current vacancies in the Chicago police force.

Though residents of the Windy City are of different opinions about the camera system, one man summed up his view this way: "So as long as it's not in my living room window, it's OK."



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