



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 2, 2011

Surveillance Blimp to Patrol Over Ogden, Utah

Law enforcement is giddy about the imminent deployment of the Crime Blimp and plans to use the vehicle's technology to link all of the town's private and public closed-circuit TV (CCTV) cameras into one massive and powerful crime-fighting monitoring matrix.



According to published reports, the Utah Department of Transportation and the Utah Transit Authority have volunteered to allow their cameras to be linked with the new video center headquarters that is scheduled to be centered in the remodeled offices of the police department.

City officials plan to launch the blimp in April. The unique surveillance device is currently being developed by Weber State University's Utah Center for Aeronautical Innovation and Design.

Currently the guts of the machine are being engineered to be completely integrated with both the existing surveillance cameras and the video-monitoring headquarters that will come online any day. The goal for the complete coordination and integration of all the cameras, the center, and the blimp is set for July.

As news of the blimp and the increased surveillance it will facilitate has come to the knowledge of citizens, concerns over the potential for government abuse of such a scheme have developed.

Bernie Allen, a local Ogden lawyer, told the Ogden *Standard-Examiner* that the plans for the surveillance scheme as "scary."

"Talk about your Big Brother, it's 'A Brave New World,' " he added, making reference to a couple of well-known novels wherein constant monitoring of the activities of citizens was key to the control exerted by despotic governments.

The *Standard-Examiner* [reports](#):

An inventory of the city's central business district, between 18th and 28th streets, Adams and Wall avenues, has identified 37 businesses with external security cameras, said Dave Weloth, the OPD crime analyst who is overseeing the real time crime center's development and will likely be its manager.

Several local business owners report that Weloth and his associates have approached them requesting that they allow their privately owned security cameras to be integrated with the more than 200 cameras owned and operated by the city government.

While not all the 37 businesses within the business district in question have been asked to sign on to the planned integration, of those that have been approached, Weloth reports that at least six have come on board.

In what reads like a half-hearted attempt to defuse the "Big Brother" associations, Weloth assured



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citizens that, "We're only interested in the external cameras."

In another likely unsuccessful effort to ameliorate the effects of such a radical plan to place private cameras under public control, the chief of the Ogden Police Department stated, "We're not taking control of anyone's camera system. We just want to be sure it's recording."

Jess McLellan is the man responsible for integrating the private security camera systems with Ogden's real-time camera center (RTCC).

In a curious use of language, McLellan described the complete integration of the private and public cameras with the RTCC and the surveillance Crime Blimp as a "dream come true." The web of surveillance, he added, would "give cops eyes on the crime scene before they get there." McLellan made no mention of the fact that every movement of every innocent citizen that was within range of one of the hundreds of linked cameras or under the watchful eye of the government agent in the sky above them would be monitored and recorded.

As for the specific technical specifications of the blimp, published reports indicated that it will be 52 feet long and 4 feet in diameter. It will carry a 20-pound payload of cameras, GPS gear, and telemetry. If it is deployed on schedule, the Ogden Crime Blimp will be the first to fly full-time above an American city.

Bernie Allen, the attorney with the literary flair, made a very germane point with regard to the Constitution's protection against unwarranted searches.

"If police can't go into your backyard without probable cause, then why would they be allowed to fly over your backyard with a blimp?" he asks.

"There will be all sorts of legal challenges. If something can't be seen from a public vantage point, then it's private and protected. A blimp changes all that."

Another insightful question with constitutional implications was asked by another local lawyer. "Is the blimp out looking for work?" asked Camille Neider, a former deputy Weber County Attorney turned defense counsel. "Or is it a reactive tool, sent to a chase or a search?"

Neider [told](#) the *Standard-Examiner*, "If my 6-year-old walks away, then yes, it's great to have a blimp," she said. "But there's good with bad in any technology. You're depending on the character and integrity of the people using it."

Again, it's Weloth to the defense of the deployment. "We're not interested in filming the city's 80,000-plus population," he insists, "just the ones causing trouble."

Neither the lenses of those hundreds of CCTV security cameras mounted on corners or in lobbies of buildings around town nor those deployed inside the airborne Crime Blimp can distinguish between troublemaker and law abider, however. The computers and recording devices that will record and store the movements of everyone within sight are likewise unintelligent and therein lies the as yet unaddressed issue of the unwarranted searches that are obvious violations of constitutional protections against such government intrusion.

Watch this [video](#) for an interview on the subject with the mayor of Ogden.



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