

AIC *Crime reduction matters*

27 January 2004, no. 18
ISSN 1448-1383



Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) as a crime prevention measure

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance systems are an increasingly common crime prevention initiative in Australia. A recent study reported that CCTV systems were in operation in 33 major urban centres in every state and territory, except the NT.

CCTV will often be used around public space in urban centres and on public housing estates; in retail malls, individual shops and banks (particularly around Automatic Teller Machines); on public transport (including stations, trains, buses and taxis); and in car parks.

CCTV systems can be expensive to install, maintain and operate. Costs will vary significantly according to the size of the system, the technology used, and the management approach. The crime prevention attraction of CCTV lies with its capacity for constant surveillance of potentially hazardous spaces, as well as being a source of evidence when an incident does occur.

As such the crime prevention value is seen to be a major deterrent measure. It is this deterrent effect that is also thought to contribute to the increases in the sense of community safety that is often noted following the introduction of a CCTV system.

But just how effective are CCTV systems as a crime prevention measure? The evidence suggests that the answer to this question is ambiguous. It depends on what type of CCTV system is considered, the location used, management and operation, and what crimes are targeted. In other words, like any other crime prevention measure, the effectiveness of CCTV will be variable.

The best available research consistently suggests that CCTV has no effect on violent crime. Better results have been found for its ability to prevent property crime, particularly vehicle crime. CCTV systems have been found to be especially effective when used in car parks. Results in city centre locations and around public housing estates, while generally positive, have been more mixed. The effectiveness of CCTV when used on public transport systems is very inconsistent.

One consistent finding shows that when the introduction of a CCTV system has some positive impact, the CCTV measure has usually been part of a variety of crime prevention measures implemented as a package. This is an important finding: if CCTV is to be an effective crime prevention tool, then it must be carefully planned and integrated with other measures. It must also be carefully targeted, and comprehensively implemented. CCTV will not work by itself.

Further reading:

Welsh B & Farrington D (2002), *Crime prevention effects of CCTV: a systematic review* **Home Office Research Study 252**, London, Home Office

Wilson D & Sutton A (2003), *Open Street CCTV in Australia* **Trends and Issues 271** Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology



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