

Closed circuit television (CCTV): recent findings

The use of CCTV in Australia noted in *AI Crime reduction matters* no. 18 in 2004 has continued to rise rapidly. Systems are commonly used on public transport, in shopping areas, in commercial premises and in car parks. Additional evidence of a further increase in use amongst local councils is now available, along with recent research that confirms that CCTV systems have a limited crime prevention value, being most useful in preventing property crime, particularly vehicle related crime.

A 2005 survey by IRIS Research of all local councils in Australia (excluding the ACT) found that there were at least 45 open air camera systems in operation compared with 33 reported in 2003. In total, 61 local government authorities (9%) reported that they had some type of CCTV system in various settings, mostly open air shopping malls or plazas, outdoor city centres other than malls, or on council property. Most were in Queensland and New South Wales and nearly two-thirds had been installed within the past six years.

A review (Welsh & Farrington 2006) of high quality evaluations of the effectiveness of CCTV as a crime prevention measure concluded that there was an overall eight percent reduction in crime in the experimental areas where CCTV was installed compared with a nine percent increase in crime in the control areas. The review included evaluations of 19 sites in the UK and the USA. Other findings from this meta-analysis concluded that CCTV interventions were more successful in car parks than in other settings such as city centres or housing estates, and that CCTV interventions were generally more successful in the UK than in the USA.

Where CCTV systems in car parks were evaluated it was noted these usually included other related crime prevention activities such as improved lighting or the presence of a security guard alongside CCTV systems. This reinforces key recommendations from previous evaluations that CCTV is best implemented as part of a package of crime prevention measures.

Evaluations (e.g. Gill & Spriggs 2005) show that it is important to involve police in the planning, implementation and monitoring aspects of CCTV systems. Police intelligence is useful in planning where to install the cameras. Protocols need to be in place for the people monitoring CCTV systems to be able to alert the police to incidents; this can enable a rapid response to observed incidents. It is also the police who can potentially use footage from CCTV systems to solve crime and to secure prosecutions. Therefore local police involvement is crucial in any decision to implement CCTV systems in local areas.

References

Gill M & Spriggs A 2005. *Assessing the impact of CCTV*. Home Office Research Study 292. London: Home Office

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Welsh BC & Farrington DP 2006. Closed-circuit television surveillance, in Welsh BC & Farrington DP (eds) *Preventing crime: what works for children, offenders, victims, and places*. Dordrecht: Springer: 193–208