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Police rely on government-owned and private-business video systems

By Megan Caldwell

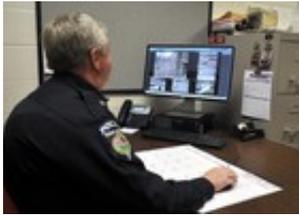
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State College Police officer David White uses the Genetec program to see live surveillance video of different areas of State College, March 25, 2014. The State College Borough is in the process of installing 71 cameras in the borough. NABIL K. MARK





STATE COLLEGE — On Feb. 16, a woman was assaulted in a State College apartment laundry room. Soon, borough police were looking for the assailant by releasing video of him to the public.

The attack took place in the Park Hill Apartments, 478 E. Beaver Ave., in the fourth-floor laundry room. Police obtained surveillance video from the landlord.

The video shows a college-age man walking down a hallway wearing a dark, hooded sweatshirt. Because police had the approximate time of the incident they were able to find the man in a hallway video taken on the fourth floor.

It's an example of how surveillance cameras in State College — both publicly and privately owned — help police locate criminals and collect evidence.

“Any major city you go to, you will see them,” said State College Lt. Keith Robb. “No one is manning them. It is a free recording, so we are able to get good footage.”

In addition to the release of video to media and on the borough's website, a detective created a flier “that included an image of the suspect from the video system,” State College Police Chief Tom King said. Copies of the flier were placed under the doors of every apartment in the building. To date, there has been no arrest in the case.

The borough is installing 71 new cameras in the municipal building, parking garages and downtown areas. The police department views the cameras as invaluable, Robb said.

There are currently three, longtime borough-owned cameras in downtown public areas. Fourteen more downtown sites will have cameras watching by the end of the summer, according to Hillary Pasch, the borough's information technology manager.

The camera feeds go straight into the police department's computers, so if police need to go back and search for a possible incident, they can readily do so, Robb said. The cameras will help with traffic violations, identifying participants in bar fights and other activity.

The current cameras have signs nearby informing passers-by of their presence, and the new cameras will follow suit.

“We are not hiding these cameras from people,” Robb said. “We want people to know they are there. It is more preventative rather than apprehensive.”

It is not unusual for State College police to receive video from apartment owners, as was the case with the assault in the Park Hill Apartments.

Landlords install cameras to combat property damage. If a door is broken, they can use video to show who did what, Robb said. The landlords then send a copy to the police to help them find the person responsible.

Associated Realty Property Management, which manages some of the major apartment buildings downtown, did not return multiple phone calls seeking comment. Another landlord, AW & Sons, declined to comment on the subject.

“We have an office liaison that works with the landlords to help in situations like these,” Robb said. “It is a two-way street. They help us, we help them.”

Reviewing hours of video is not easy when police do not have a time frame for when an incident occurred. When burglaries occur over college breaks, it is harder to pinpoint the perpetrator because there can be weeks of video to pore through, Robb said.

For minor crimes such as criminal mischief, video has helped in the investigations in several hundred cases, Robb said. In assault cases, sexual or otherwise, it has aided in several dozen investigations.

“Camera footage helps substantiate evidence,” Robb said. “The more buildings with video, the easier it will be for us.”

In addition to cameras in buildings, the Centre Area Transportation Authority has installed audio and visual recording devices on its 30 newest buses, marketing manager Jacqueline Sheader said.

Eight cameras are located inside and outside each bus and are constantly recording. The cameras cost \$8,000 to \$10,000 for each bus.

If an incident begins, the driver can hit a button that marks the tape so it will be easier to find the incident later.

“Drivers mark them regularly,” Sheader said. “We do it for their protection as much as ours.”

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