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Our View | We better get used to being watched

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A video-surveillance camera monitors the Beaver Ave. and Hiester Street intersection in downtown State College.

NABIL K. MARK — CDT photo [Buy Photo](#)

State College and Penn State are expanding the number of surveillance cameras at work in the downtown and across campus.

Although some may be unnerved at the thought of being watched as they move among buildings and along sidewalks, we see the trend as a natural progression as entities turn to improving technology to help keep safe those working, shopping or studying in their midst.

“I know there are lots of people who are going to think, ‘We’re being watched by Big Brother,’ ” said Paul Ruskin, business operations coordinator at the Penn State Office of Physical Plant.

“Society changes with technology all the time,” Ruskin said.

“This is new technology giving our campus the opportunity to be a safer campus.”

The proliferation of surveillance cameras was explored in a special report Sunday and Monday that was researched and written by Penn State students for the CDT and CentreDaily.com.

Penn State already has more than 2,000 lenses trained on major sites such as the Bryce Jordan Center and Old Main, and is adding 422 cameras this spring in a \$1.4 million effort.

The university now routinely includes security cameras in plans for renovations or new construction, Ruskin said. Soon, surveillance will be commonplace outside dormitories and common areas.

Penn State officials think the presence of cameras will deter some dangerous behavior while helping campus police watch and react.

“It is a force multiplier for police,” Ruskin said. “This campus has 946 buildings on it. As good a police force as we have, we don’t have one person per building.”

State College has used video surveillance since 2003, and is adding 71 new wireless cameras this year through a \$450,000 contract. They will be installed at the borough building, in parking garages and at high-traffic intersections.

Although officials are hopeful that the downtown cameras will deter some activity, the primary use is intended to be for police investigations. The borough also has access to many private cameras in place at businesses, apartment buildings and elsewhere.

We live in a video world, where the person standing beside you at the bus stop or behind you at the grocery store could be capturing your image on a smartphone ready to post it to YouTube.

But there is an upside to this “eye in the sky” reality. Cameras help police and other security professionals do their jobs.

We frequently publish reports from local police who have video images of break-ins or robberies and want help finding the suspects. A year ago, investigators quickly learned the identities of the Boston Marathon bombers thanks to surveillance cameras as well as witnesses.

Cameras watch the crowds at Penn State football games — even tailgaters in parking lots around Beaver Stadium. If you enter a business or government facility in our region, you will almost certainly pass a camera watching your every move.

While our society has yielded a degree of privacy in exchange for this protection, we suspect only those likely to turn up on a video doing something they shouldn’t would truly oppose the increased use of technology for security.

Upon having a nearby camera pointed out to her, Penn State student Amy Haun said: “I have thought ... ‘What if something happens? Who would know?’ And now that I see that, I feel a little better.”

Indeed. We may all feel a little safer walking along quiet borough streets knowing that — at the very least — if we become crime victims, the criminals stand a better chance of being caught by an eye in the sky.

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