

Los Angeles News 

High-tech cameras go up in Valley neighborhood

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NORTH HILLS, LOS ANGELES (KABC) -- The LAPD is watching: New high-tech surveillance cameras are up in several local communities, giving police the power to zoom in on pedestrians and drivers.

Within a 1-square-mile area in the Mission Hills district, one-third of all crimes are occurring overall in the 25-square-mile district. That is where the cameras are focused.

LAPD shows what they believe is a crime unfolding. Officers are not present at the scene to see what the man on the screen does next, an alleged act of graffiti vandalism. But a camera is catching every move and transmitting to a monitor at the Mission Hills police station.

"What he was doing was actually etching into this gas pump here," said LAPD Capt. Bill Scott.

Funded by the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, the \$360,000 surveillance system can zoom in from two blocks away, showing faces and license plates.

"Our detectives followed up on that information, brought the suspect in and the person confessed and that case right now is at the city attorney's office," said Scott.

Now LAPD has nine new cameras in the North Hills/Panorama City area. Though crime is trending downward, some neighborhoods have been chronic hotspots.

"A lot of drug dealers [are] here and shooting. So there is no safety," said neighbor Hayde Barrios.

"Some violence, lot of gang members, people get killed out here," said neighbor Moses Nidez.

L.A. City Councilman Richard Alarcon is pushing for the cameras and vouches for the need.

"In fact last night at about 11:30 I heard 20 rounds of gunfire just sitting at home," said Alarcon.

A similar system is in service in Redlands. It's credited with stretching their police force after a quarter of their officers had to be laid off. Today the department reports a dramatic change in nuisance crimes.

How will it do in Panorama City? Neighbor Moses Nidez has his doubts.

"People are probably going to be, 'Oh, that doesn't intimidate me,'" said Nidez.

Police do not claim it's a cure-all. They characterize it as a complement to many other crime-fighting tools like community policing, patrols and gang injunctions. Neighbors say they welcome the cameras.

"So it is good because it is safety for us, especially as that we have kids," said Barrios the neighbor.

The LAPD says the price is right too. That's because a police officer doesn't have to do the monitoring. A community volunteer can be trained to do the monitoring for free.

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