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Smile, you're on camera
Police testing video surveillance
By DAN ARSENAULT Crime Reporter

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Security cameras might soon join handcuffs, guns and bulletproof vests in Halifax Regional Police's arsenal of crime-fighting tools.

The force is testing the cameras in a variety of ways and will submit a report to the board of police commissioners, which will then report to Halifax regional council.

"I don't think there's any desire to become Big Brother," said Supt. Bill Moore, who's in charge of the police feasibility study. "This has to be weighed on what is the benefit to public safety."

He said cops have used cameras to gather evidence for a long time, but earlier this year they started to look into using permanently placed cameras or others to handle major events. He wouldn't say how many cameras the force has.

Police in Antigonish, Kentville, Truro and Annapolis Royal already use surveillance cameras.

Supt. Moore said Halifax police tested the cameras at the Rolling Stones concert on Sept. 23.

"Some were on poles and some were just on buildings," he said. "We used it more for monitoring major intersections for traffic and movement of people in and out of the venue site."

He said camera operators can use software to point and focus toward certain objects and direct officers on the ground accordingly.

"We were able to get reports of something going on and pan to that area and very quickly ascertain whether there was anything going on or nothing. It did save us a little bit of response."

Some trouble spots might get permanent cameras, Supt. Moore said.

"Certainly Pizza Corner (the intersection of Blowers and Grafton streets) would be one of those areas that potentially could, I think, benefit from a camera like this."

The study is concerned with how best to use the cameras, if they prove effective. For example, it isn't yet known if the cameras should be working around the clock, whether an officer should monitor them continually, where the cameras should be placed and so on.

Supt. Moore said he didn't know if police would advertise which areas would be getting security

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Pedestrians make their way through the intersection at Grafton and Blowers streets in downtown Halifax on Wednesday evening. Police want to use 24-hour cameras to monitor this area and other trouble spots in the city. (Peter Parsons / Staff)

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

" If a building becomes architecture, then it is art. "

Arne Jacobsen

cameras.

Asked about expected complaints from privacy advocates, he said: "From a policing perspective, we are certainly going to have to listen to what their issues are."

Rocky Tayona, who owns the ASAP Bar and Grill on Blowers Street, welcomes the idea of a camera at nearby Pizza Corner. Mr. Tayona barbecues Filipino-style meat in front of his business on weekend nights and uses a security camera to keep an eye on some customers.

"So you will know who the bad people are," he said Wednesday.

He said there's usually a fight at Pizza Corner every weekend night, "especially if the weather is good."

If people know they're on camera, there will be less trouble, he said.

"They're going to be behaving themselves."

The Nova Scotia Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Review Office has guidelines, solely intended as a reference, for the use of surveillance in public areas by public authorities.

One suggests that recording should be considered only "to address a real, pressing and substantial problem."

Another says privacy impact assessments should be done to assess how privacy would be affected and how possible infringements could be mitigated.

Information collected by cameras "should be restricted, its disclosure controlled, its retention limited and its destruction assured," the guidelines say.

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