



Using CCTV to reduce antisocial behaviour

Personal security in public places has become an area of increasing concern to governments in the past 10 years in Australia and overseas. One response has been a significant increase in the use of closed circuit television (CCTV) in densely populated areas such as central business districts and entertainment districts. CCTV is employed as a surveillance measure in such areas to monitor behaviour of individuals and in public spaces as a deterrent and opportunity reduction measure (see AIC 2006).

The rise in the popularity of CCTV in Australian public spaces has mirrored a global trend towards monitoring public spaces (Wilson 2008). This was first seen in the United Kingdom and then through the European Union and many other countries (Wilson 2008). Australia has not embraced CCTV with the same enthusiasm as the northern hemisphere but programs have been funded for CCTV by all levels of government. One of the key criticisms of and concerns about CCTV is the ambiguous evidence surrounding its effectiveness in preventing and reducing crime, with mixed results from overseas evaluations (see Welsh & Farrington 2008). Evaluations of programs exploring the crime reductive elements of CCTV have been equivocal, however research suggests that CCTV is most useful in reducing or solving crime when there is an active police interest in using the

evidence it can provide (AIC 2006). This is where CCTV is likely to be of most value in entertainment districts.

The Victorian Department of Justice (2009) notes three main applications of CCTV and security cameras in entertainment districts to date.

- » **As a deterrent to committing a crime:** Use of surveillance cameras as a criminal deterrent is most likely to succeed as part of a broader crime reduction strategy with active monitoring and where police are able to respond quickly to a developing incident.
- » **For criminal prosecution:** The most effective application of surveillance cameras is as a forensic tool to identify the offender in a crime or to eliminate suspects. Images must be of high quality to be acceptable as evidence in criminal prosecution.
- » **To enhance community safety:** The visible presence of surveillance cameras (particularly CCTV in public spaces) can enhance perceptions of safety within the community, which is constructive in developing public confidence and reducing the fear of crime.

These identified uses for CCTV in entertainment districts require thorough evaluation to determine their efficacy.

However, it is clear that there is a continuing important role for CCTV in the targeting of antisocial behaviour in entertainment districts, particularly as a method for addressing alcohol-fuelled violence and vandalism. While the value of CCTV as a deterrent to antisocial behaviour remains ambiguous, its use in enhancing capacity to respond quickly to dangerous behaviour and to support criminal investigations and prosecution should not be discounted (Wilson 2008).

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