

GAO
Accountability • Integrity • Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-748](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Law enforcement use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) as a tool to fight crime and terrorism has become more prevalent over time. Civil liberties advocates have raised privacy concerns about its use.

This report describes (1) the Metropolitan Police Department's and the United States Park Police's implementation of CCTV to monitor public spaces in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area such as the National Mall and (2) the management controls they established to address privacy concerns. GAO also identified experiences of selected CCTV users that provide insights to help ensure the proper CCTV use.

VIDEO SURVEILLANCE

Information on Law Enforcement's Use of Closed-Circuit Television to Monitor Selected Federal Property in Washington, D.C.

What GAO Found

The Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia's CCTV system was implemented, among other things, to facilitate crowd management during large demonstrations; however, officials indicated that the system could also be used to help combat terrorism. The system is used on an as-needed basis for such things as crowd control and when the national terrorism threat level is set to high alert (code orange). The Metropolitan Police Department obtained public comments on its implementation of CCTV. In contrast, the United States Park Police uses CCTV, among other purposes, primarily to combat terrorism and operates its CCTV system on a continuous basis. The United States Park Police has not obtained public input on its implementation of CCTV, but it is considering providing the public an opportunity to provide input.

The Metropolitan Police developed regulations and the United States Park Police developed draft policies for operating their CCTV systems. Both include management controls that address the protection of privacy and the proper use of CCTV such as the need for supervision to protect against improper use and the establishment of procedures to control access to CCTV images.

The experiences of CCTV users in the United Kingdom (UK) and selected U.S. cities revealed best practices for the implementation and use of CCTV. For example, UK and U.S. officials considered providing training and audits helpful to ensuring proper use of CCTV. Officials in the UK and others shared their best practices that include (1) operating CCTV systems in an open environment helps to alleviate privacy concerns; (2) having uniform standards helps to reassure the public that safeguards are in place when utilizing CCTV and provides CCTV operators guidance for proper use; and (3) establishing realistic, clear, and measurable goals helps make CCTV systems more effective and can also reassure the public about its use.

A CCTV Control Room



Source: Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-748.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Rich Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.