

Wireless camera raises new 'spy' fears

THE number of surveillance cameras in Britain is set to double over the next three years to 2m following Home Office approval of a new system that can be run at a fraction of the cost of existing networks.

The new system is a wireless application which employs mobile phone technology to beam pictures from cameras to portable monitoring devices such as laptops and hand-held PCs. It will cost up to 80% less than conventional closed-circuit television (CCTV) packages because it eliminates the need for expensive cabling.

Police forces, struggling to maintain patrol levels outside city centres, have welcomed the development as it will allow them to keep an eye on rural and suburban areas at low cost.

However, with Britain already the biggest user in the world of CCTV, civil liberties campaigners fear the growth of a Big Brother culture. An individual is already likely to be filmed by up to 300 cameras a day, according to experts.

"We are very concerned about the fact that the protection of privacy and regulation of CCTV is lagging behind new developments in technology like this," said John Wadham, the director of Liberty.

As many as 20 public bodies,

James Clark and Dipesh Gadhur

including local authorities and police forces, are expected to receive Home Office funding to set up the new surveillance technology over the coming months following the successful completion of trials earlier this year. Smaller organisations, such as schools, are likely to be encouraged to apply for government

grants for the system, even if it means just a single camera as a crime reduction measure.

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"Expanding CCTV is very much on our agenda," said a Home Office source last week. "This type of equipment is something we have had people looking at for quite a while."

"It means that we can get cameras into more difficult and isolated areas without having to spend loads of money or digging up the neighbourhood."

The new equipment, based on an open-circuit television security system (OCTV), has

been developed by Shawley, an electronics company in Newport, south Wales.

The firm has signed contracts with police forces in Australia, New Zealand and Thailand, as well as selling the technology to many private companies around the world.

The OCTV system uses spe-

cially adapted pan, tilt and zoom cameras, costing about £3,000 each, which contain a hard drive and a mobile phone to allow data to be transmitted to remote devices. A police officer can view footage from a camera or manoeuvre its position — whether he is around the corner or in another country — by dialling it from either a desktop PC, a portable laptop or a hand-held device.

For security purposes, the camera will respond only to a registered monitoring device and an authorised telephone

number. The images it sends will be encrypted.

The Home Office accepts that OCTV images are good enough to be used as evidence in court. However, OCTV will be revolutionised by the advent of third-generation, or 3G, mobile phone technology.

Under this system, likely to take off in Britain in the next two to three years, far more digital information can be transmitted much more quickly.

"This system is ideally suited to smaller towns and villages," said Olinga Ta'eed, managing director of Shawley. "We can't claim that the image quality we are offering now is better than the £500,000 city CCTV systems but it will vastly improve with the arrival of 3G."

Home Office trials of the OCTV system were conducted over two months around King's Lynn in Norfolk and near Hexham in Northumbria.

"Our plan is not to tackle crime as such but to reduce the fear of crime — and to that end this system was ideal," said PC Harry Wilkinson, crime prevention officer in Hexham.

Northumbria is likely to be one of the first areas to install the system on a permanent basis. Interest has also been shown by police in Nottinghamshire and the West Midlands.

Wireless surveillance cameras located in isolated spots will allow roving police officers to spot crimes as they happen

1

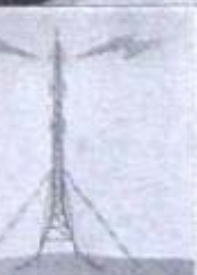
Camera can be adjusted remotely to relay live pictures or record a crime

3

Police officer dials up the camera to receive images through a portable computer

2

Encrypted images from the camera are transmitted across the mobile phone network



Graphic: Julian O'Connell