



# **An Overview of Surveillance Cameras Used to Combat Demand in the United States**

**Summary Based Upon  
Research from the Study, “A  
National Assessment of  
Prostitution and Sex  
Trafficking Demand  
Reduction Efforts”**

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While cameras are very widely used for general surveillance purposes, and the growth in their use began decades ago, their use specifically to target men who are (or may be) buying sex has not been widely adopted. While we found that 67 cities and counties had used them in some way against men buying sex, only a handful of communities approach their use programmatically or as part of a comprehensive effort to deter or capture johns. Some applications are covert, with hidden cameras used to produce visual evidence that can be used by police and prosecutors. Other uses are overt and designed for deterrence rather than punishment. A few examples of the use of surveillance cameras follow:

- **Tacoma, WA:** Conspicuous surveillance cameras are placed in active prostitution areas with signs saying, “Smile johns, you’re on camera.” A YouTube channel, called StopCrimeOnTacomaAve posts videos of apparent prostitution and drug deals.
- **Rochester, NY:** Surveillance cameras are used covertly in areas with street prostitution, to acquire evidence that can make cases against arrested johns.
- **Durham, NC:** Thirteen wireless cameras focus on “hot spots” of crime, including prostitution.

Year	City or County	State
1989	Horry County	SC
1990	Harrisburg	PA
1991	Tallahassee	FL
1994	Monroe	NC
1994	Tacoma	WA
1997	Everett	WA
1999	El Cajon	CA
1999	Lafayette	LA
2000	Erie County	NY
2000	Woonsocket	RI
2003	Brockton	MA
2003	Kissimmee	FL
2005	Athens	GA
2005	Dodge County	MN
2005	Kingsport	TN

### Example: Gordon Heights, New York

Gordon Heights is an area in Suffolk County on Long Island, New York. In 1991, news outlets reported that a Gordon Heights Community Watch group started writing letters to the wives and mothers of those arrested for soliciting prostituted women. In 1993, reports indicated that prostitution had "invaded" residential streets and schoolyards, and members of a neighborhood watch group

began patrolling their streets with video cameras as part of community policing program. In this Long Island city, two family members in Gordon Heights said they had been videotaping prostituted women and their customers for two and half years, using the taping to scare sex buyers out of the neighborhood. The videotaping by community volunteers was done with the approval and guidance of police. Twelve volunteers patrolled the neighborhood in teams of two, and were required to call police before going out to videotape, so cruisers could be in the area. The volunteers were mostly parents of school-age children. As they patrolled, one volunteer wrote down license plate numbers and car descriptions while the other taped situations appearing to be prostitution transactions. The teams were instructed by police to leave the area after witnessing these situations to avoid confrontations.

### **Example: Hobart, Indiana**

The Hobart Police Department conducted a reverse sting in response to tips and complaints of alleged prostitution activity in a home. After monitoring the home, police apprehended a man as he left and questioned the woman in the home who admitted to selling sex. The woman agreed to serve as a decoy in a reverse sting and continue arranging appointments with sex buyers. Police placed hidden cameras and audio recorders in the house. Five men, in addition to the initial man apprehended by police, were arrested when they appeared at the home and attempted to buy sex. The video recordings served to bolster evidence against the arrested johns.

### **References**

References for the materials cited in this summary can be found in the bibliography of the National Assessment final report, and in each site's webpage at DemandForum.net.