

Surveillance Cameras

1. What is the purpose of the system - To deter crime or identify those captured on camera who has committed the crime? Professional installation and high quality resolution are important if the police are to be able to use the images to track down the criminals.
2. Installing a camera does not guaranteed that thieves will be identified and caught but it may provide the police with an additional investigative tool.
3. The best prevention is not having thieves gain access in the first place so ensure you spend money on **security hardware** first to reduce the chance of thieves gaining entry through doors and windows.
4. **Educate** people in the building about security - waiting for the garage gate to close and not opening the door for strangers and/or buzzing in people they don't know. Cameras may help identify the criminal after the fact, but crime prevention is the best tool.
5. The **placement of the camera** is more important than the number of cameras you have. If the camera's angle is too high or wide it will seldom provide images from which a person could be identified. Cameras should be at or near head level and zoomed in enough to provide a stomach to head image of those captured on it. Have the camera installed in a secure area as at eye level they can be more easily tampered with. The thief may keep their head down, or cover the glass so the image is not captured, damage the equipment or even steal it. There are cameras that are less obvious such as pin-hole cameras. Discuss options with security companies.
6. In multi-unit buildings, cameras should be situated at each exit and set to detect motion. Having **cameras set to detect motion** will save hard drive space on your digital video recorder as it will not record any video unless there is movement in the camera.
7. Ensure that there is **sufficient lighting** in the area under surveillance. Lighting should be balanced to avoid areas with excessive light or shadow and backlighting.
8. **Color cameras** are preferable over black and white and many high quality color cameras can switch to black and white in low light conditions.
9. Images seen from the video monitor may look better than when the recorded video is exported from the system's hard drive. This is because the live video is uncompressed and has full detail and clarity. Therefore the quality of the system should be determined by **viewing previously recorded video and not live feed.**

10. Cameras and their lenses are critically important when it comes to image quality. It is important to get a high quality name brand camera and lens. Images should be recorded at a minimum of **640x480 pixels**. Use the highest resolution possible.
11. Ask **how long the recording is kept** - If the image is only available for 24 hours and you don't see the crime for a couple of days the camera may be of no value. Do use the lowest compression possible. Larger files that take up more, not less hard drive space. It is better to hold one week of good quality video than three or more weeks of poor quality video. You will have to balance the need for keeping the images with whether or not it will generate a useable image.
12. **Avoid Split screen images**; these are inferior to systems that show only one camera view on the screen. When several camera views take up each frame of video it makes it less likely that a suspect captured on the camera could be identified.
13. The images from the recorder should be **date and time stamped** – check periodically to make sure they are accurate.
14. The video image needs to be in a **format** that can be viewed by police for example AVI, MOV, MP4, again some of the cheaper cameras may provide a format that is not easily transferrable.
15. Make sure there is an easy way to get the video images on and off the digital video recorder. It should have a CD/DVD writer and or USB port in order to export the video.
16. Ensure that the company who supplies the equipment provides **support if you encounter technical difficulties**.

A citizen who operates a personal video camera that observes the street and neighbourhood is not subject to the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA). However, if a strata council or a Block Watch team operates the camera, then they should carefully review these guidelines. You may refer to these privacy and surveillance guidelines, issued by the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of British Columbia:

Privacy Guidelines For Landlords and Tenants (October 14, 2010)

<https://www.oipc.bc.ca/guidance-documents/1456>

Guidelines for Overt Video Surveillance in the Private Sector (March 03, 2008)

<https://www.oipc.bc.ca/guidance-documents/1453>

Privacy Guidelines for Strata Corporations and Strata Agents (June 22, 2015)

<https://www.oipc.bc.ca/guidance-documents/1455>