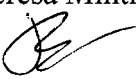




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TO: Chief of Staff Theresa Mintle
FROM: Joseph Ferguson 
RE: Security Cameras
DATE: 9/14/2012

From its work, the Inspector General's Office is aware that the City of Chicago outfits many of its facilities with video cameras. This is done for a variety of monitoring purposes, including security. Video footage is useful as evidence of criminal activity and various lesser forms of misconduct occurring in City facilities. Moreover, the mere physical presence of a functioning video system tends to deter some from engaging in misconduct in the first place. Equally important, video also may exonerate City employees who are the subject of false allegations. Additionally, video may from time to time be a useful tool for identifying improvements in operations.

Given the proliferation of internal and external security cameras installed at City facilities and properties, it is inevitable that at any given time there will be some that do not work as intended. However, in the course of numerous investigations and audits the IGO has encountered City security cameras that are in a significant state of disrepair or compromised operability. It is not uncommon for the IGO to attempt to obtain security video of activities occurring in City facilities as potential evidence in an IGO investigation only to find the cameras were not functioning. Relatedly, follow-up inquiry by the IGO often results in acknowledgement at both the department and facility level that installed security cameras are not subject to regular testing and maintenance, and in more extreme cases, have been wholly neglected for indeterminate periods.

By way of example:

An IGO investigation involving cashiers at the Clerk's Office who deal with large amounts of cash was impeded when the IGO requested the video recording of the site of suspected criminal misconduct at a teller station and was informed that the camera housing (the round, opaque cover) had filled with water due to a leak from the ceiling above. While the camera was live, the image it produced was blurred to an extent that made it essentially useless. In the same investigation, another camera in the same facility that should have produced serviceable alternative images was rendered ineffectual because the camera's field of view had at some prior unknown time migrated from its installed position and thus captured activity of only a small portion of the intended monitoring area.

Even where security video is available, it is not unusual for the IGO to find it to have technical limitations that frustrate its intended purpose. The following additional examples from recent IGO cases are offered to illustrate this situation:

In the course of a recent investigation, the IGO recovered a security video recording that was clear and focused, but had a digital time stamp substantially out of sync with the events being recorded, thus severely impairing its evidentiary value.

An IGO investigation regarding the improper euthanizing of a dog by an Animal Care and Control employee was impeded due to a non-functioning camera in the dog pavilion at ACC.

An IGO investigation of bribery against an ACC employee was also hampered by a broken camera that should have been covering the ACC parking lot. Fortunately, video footage from a working camera in the lobby of ACC actually exonerated the employee as it showed that the ACC employee had not taken a bribe as the complainant had falsely alleged.

During an IGO theft investigation, the IGO found that only four of twelve video cameras were working at the Department of General Services facility where the theft occurred.

Additional instances further exemplify that this widespread situation also limits the City's options for criminal prosecutions and civil recovery actions.

An IGO investigation into the theft of fuel from multiple City fueling stations was impeded due to a lack of available video documentation because of the inoperable state of cameras installed in a number of the facilities. The subject City employee had used his credentials to obtain gas for his personal vehicle more than 100 times. However, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office (CCSAO) would prosecute only those instances occurring at the sole fueling station where the security camera was working and thus captured images of the employee engaged in this illegal activity.

A separate investigation of the similar activity, this time by an employee of the Chicago Transit Authority using City fueling stations, was likewise hampered by lack of visual evidence due to malfunctioning video security equipment. The CCSAO again prosecuted only a small percentage of the total number of instances for which a properly functioning City security camera recorded the CTA employee illegally filling his personal vehicle with City fuel.

Beyond the impact to investigative and litigative equities, the failure to properly maintain and operate video security equipment as observed in the course of IGO audits generally constitutes an elevated risk factor for City facilities and operations. One noteworthy example follows:

During a just-concluded control audit of the CPD Evidence and Recovered Property Section, the IGO found multiple video security cameras located in the main CPD warehouse that were either not functioning or had been obscured or misdirected such as to render them effectively useless for their intended purpose. (Compromises in CPD evidence security and control systems have in years past publicly surfaced in the context of police corruption cases prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Chicago. Continuing compromises to video security in CPD evidence facilities increase the risk of recurrence.)

Given this repeated and continuing observed phenomenon spanning numerous City departments and facilities, the IGO recommends, at a minimum, that all City departments that have installed surveillance or security cameras perform an inventory audit to determine which cameras are operational and which require repair or replacement. Further, the IGO recommends that the City direct all relevant departments to develop and adhere to a periodic testing and maintenance schedule to assure the operability, functionality, focus, field of view, and accuracy of the time/date on the recording of video cameras installed in and on City facilities and properties. In highlighting this problem for your attention, it warrants further note that this is an issue that may lend itself to a comprehensive Citywide approach respecting not merely the servicing and testing of video cameras, but also the procurement and operation of such equipment. At present, and as a reflection of the historically compartmentalized nature of the even most common operational needs and functions across departments, it appears that the City operates with numerous makes, models, ages, qualities, and operational modalities for such installations. The separately managed and operated equipment are not fed into a single storage facility which would enhance its use for security and investigative purposes and even as a tool for analysis of patterns of activity that would point to potential efficiencies in the operations the equipment monitors. Redress of the foregoing will ensure that the City's prior investment in these cameras is not wasted and future procurement, installation and operation is optimized, and the myriad core uses and operational value of surveillance footage is not lost or squandered due to negligence.

We request that you advise this office of any actions you take to address this ongoing situation.

The IGO's Director of Investigations, David Grossman, is available as needed to answer any questions or concerns. Mr. Grossman can be contacted at by email at dgrossman@chicagoinspectorgeneral.org and by telephone at (773) 478-0145.