

HOW TO BALANCE SECURITY AND PRIVACY

Everyone wants maximum security from their CCTV security system. And with today's wide range of high definition cameras and long duration video recording it is easier than ever to achieve a high degree of security observation and recording. Improvements in the pixel count of cameras and video equalization of the transmitted video signal guarantee the delivery of excellent sharp and clear video images.

These improvements in video image quality beg the question, when does a video security system begin to infringe on the privacy of others? When you set up a system what guidelines should you use to prevent unlawful "peeping" or invasion of privacy and how can you the installer determine what is private and what is not?

The general rule for the determination of what is private and what is not private, has to do with "the presumption of privacy". This can vary from person to person, but in general if an area can be easily viewed by the general public as an example an open yard or the interior of a public building where people are free to move about and see everything, then that area is considered to be public with no presumption of privacy. The same holds true for areas that are marked with signage to alert the people that video observation and recording is taking place.

Some areas that are presumed to have privacy are restrooms, bathrooms and changing rooms. The rule is that if an area appears to be closed off from casual viewing by the public there may be a presumption of privacy in that area.

Windows present a particularly difficult problem. You may set up your video camera to view a storage yard but in the background there could be an apartment building with windows that are clearly visible in the framing of your camera. Allowing your video camera to see inside the apartment building window and by definition what's inside the apartment is a violation of privacy standards. There is a presumption of privacy inside the apartment building and if the occupants were aware of the cameras intrusion they would file a complaint.

Careful positioning of the video camera can mitigate some of these concerns by placing private areas outside the viewing area of the camera. But to get complete coverage of an open area without overshooting into a private space usually requires the use of many more cameras with closer views to cover the jigsaw puzzle like area. The extra cameras will add to the cost of the job.

Another method to prevent the overshoot of cameras into private areas is the use of a video privacy mask. This device creates an electronic curtain on the video signal coming from the camera, it is adjustable to cover any private area with a black or obscured zone. Since it covers the area electronically with the privacy mask the area of presumed privacy is maintained and there is no invasion of privacy. Also the privacy curtain can be set for translucents so that DVR video motion detection will work without revealing personal details inside the privacy zone. This privacy mask is an add-on device that can be used whenever a privacy issue arises. The implementation of a privacy mask can be much less costly than the re-placement of cameras and the manpower to install them.

Some cameras and DVRs can be purchased with built-in privacy masks but they cost more and if you have already installed the job replacing existing equipment and wiring can be expensive.

The VPM-1 video privacy mask unit is installed at the recording end of the CCTV system on any fixed camera run. Installation is simple, just insert the unit into the path of the incoming video and power it up. Adjust the controls to cover up the private area in the video and your done.



This unit allows you to set the camera position for maximum security while still providing privacy for the neighbors. It can be used to prevent the camera from seeing into an adjacent window or in applications such as jails and prisons it can be used to mask out the toilet area inside a holding cell. This unit is available from FM SYSTEMS, INC. 1-800-235-6960.