

Consultation needed before cameras: chief

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
Staff Writer

Ever feel like you're being watched?

As Toronto police continue to install closed circuit cameras downtown, York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge won't consider it without extensive public consultation.

Toronto's force has been placing the cameras on poles at intersections along downtown Yonge Street — including around Dundas Street, where 15-year-old Jane Greba was slain by a stray bullet and six other people were wounded in a shootout on Boxing Day 2005.

While Chief La Barge supports the way Toronto's Chief Bill Blair is using cameras, York doesn't have the major urban core or the crime rate to justify cameras here.

It has been suggested before, but there has been no serious discussion on a pilot project, Chief La Barge said.

Privacy is a major sticking point. "There needs to be some greater public debate on this issue on a community-by-community basis," Chief La Barge said.

The chief wants legislators to clarify privacy issues surrounding cameras, rather than the courts handing down a decision.

A project overview from Toronto's force states being photographed in public is nothing out of the ordinary.

"People are exposed to (closed circuit cameras) in virtually every aspect of their daily lives, from going to a bank to purchasing fuel, buying groceries, visiting a shopping mall, driving on a highway or while dropping into their local coffee shop," the report states.

'There is still a right to privacy, even if it is in a public place.'

Morris Manning
lawyer

fee shop," the report states.

The use of electronic surveillance has come under fire, however.

In 2001, then-Federal Privacy Commissioner George Radwanski challenged the use of a camera by the RCMP in a Kelowna, BC park allegedly filled with drug users.

He launched a challenge under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to stop the monitoring, but it was eventually thrown out of court on technical grounds, without a decision reached.

On Friday, Morris Manning, who represented Mr. Radwanski in the

challenge, called the debate over the use of cameras "a live issue" since Toronto is using them.

There is no empirical proof cameras play a major role in stopping crime, he said, adding "criminals just move to other areas."

"I think we need to look at it from a law enforcement perspective but if they're just going to put cameras up without justifying it, we need to look at that," Mr. Manning said. "There is still a right to privacy, even if it is in a public place."

There's also a cost factor. Police officers are needed to watch what is being monitored, Chief La Barge said.

That said, Chief La Barge has seen surveillance cameras used in Israel to capture a suspect wanted in a hate crime against a Hasidic Jew.

"Without those cameras, they

may have never solved that crime," he said.

In the chief's opinion, that's the best use of cameras — as a tool for deploying law enforcement to crimes in progress.

But what cameras and even photo radar can't do is replace officers on the streets, he said.

"When crimes happen, officers have to respond," he said.

Right now, investigators work closely with private sector businesses using cameras.

Mr. Manning agrees. "Officers on the street don't invade your privacy the same way," he said.

In the new year, York Regional Police plan to launch an online archive of taped images and photographs of unsolved crimes on its website in hopes you can help them close cases.



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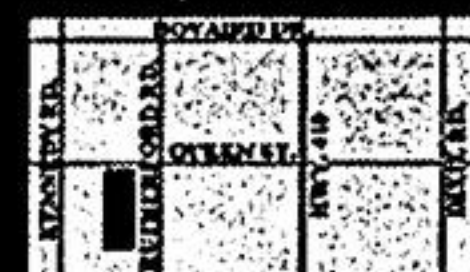
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Cops charge 101 drivers with impaired over holidays

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
Staff Writer

As York Regional Police assigned to festive RIDE spot checks have been working to find drunk drivers, their colleagues on regular patrol have arrested their share of intoxicated motorists as well.

Since Dec. 1, officers working independent of the blitz have arrested 78 impaired drivers, according to the most recent numbers.

Added to the 27 busts at various RIDE locations, it means 101 charges were laid against those allegedly driving under the influence last month.

Police have stopped 40,814 vehicles since the program began, leading to 645 roadside tests and yielding 59 12-hour suspensions.

The number of cars stopped this year is up by more than 11,200 over 2005.

On Dec. 24, quick-acting officers had to jump into the drivers' seat of a vehicle to stop it after a motorist was pulled over for erratic driving.

When the driver got out, the vehicle was left in gear and began to roll away.

The driver was charged with impaired driving, driving with more than 80 milligrams of alcohol in the blood and dangerous driving.



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