



NNEDV

Interior Video Surveillance Compromises Survivor Privacy and Healing

Trust and respect are essential in building relationships between community-based shelter programs and survivors. Protecting survivor privacy is a trauma-informed, survivor-centered way for advocates to earn the trust of survivors. Healing only becomes possible when shelter programs create safe, private spaces for survivors.

Using video surveillance inside shelters is not a trauma-informed or survivor-centered practice. Video surveillance is a common tactic of abusers to control, stalk, harass, and terrify survivors. For shelter programs to employ the same tactic erodes trust and repeats lived experiences of harm. Video surveillance can make it impossible for some survivors to have any sense of trust, safety, or healing.

Despite the need for shelters to be private, safe spaces, some programs have chosen to use video surveillance to monitor interior spaces, such as common areas. Reasons given include: mediating disputes between residents, monitoring locked medication, enforcing curfews or other shelter rules, and generally improving (perceived) safety. Each of these reasons points to a problem the program has identified that needs some solution. However, **interior video surveillance is not an appropriate solution to any problem.**

Interior video surveillance **does not improve safety**; there is no existing evidence that interior video surveillance reduces or prevents the number or severity of safety-related incidents in shelter programs. Video recordings can only be used to **enforce rules**, reactively *after* an incident through the

collection of evidence. The supposed deterrence effect of surveillance is based on creating an abstract fear of being watched. Surveilled spaces are not places of healing; they are places to be careful in. Furthermore, the use of interior video surveillance puts shelter staff in the role of enforcers of rules in addition to or in place of their important roles as facilitators of healing, and as advocates.

Finally, there is **substantial risk** that surveillance practices can lead to violations of an agency's confidentiality obligations under relevant local, state, or federal laws. Potential violations could include breaches of VAWA, VOCA, and FVPSA statutory confidentiality obligations, as well as the confidentiality obligations of any professionally licensed shelter staff.

Surveillance vs. Security

While interior video surveillance is not an appropriate practice, there may be limited benefits to exterior video surveillance of program facilities. Appropriately positioned exterior video surveillance can enhance a perception of safety for both survivors and shelter staff, or decrease the anxiety of staff responsible for securing facility entrances.

External video surveillance can also create privacy and confidentiality risks, and may deter some survivors and communities from seeking help. Just like any technology, the pros and cons need to be weighed and, if used, the tech should be implemented thoughtfully. For more information about using external surveillance devices, please review [External Video Surveillance: Considerations for Minimization of Harm](#) (link).

© 2023 National Network to End Domestic Violence, Safety Net Project.
Supported by US DOJ-OVW Grant No. 15JOVW-21-GK-02255-MUMU.
Opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed are the
authors and do not necessarily represent the views of DOJ.

We update our materials frequently. Please visit TechSafety.org for the
latest version of this and other materials.