

KEEPING AN 'EYE' ON PARK CRIMES

By RICH CALDER

February 11, 2008 -- Big Brother may soon be watching - at your local playground.

NYPD and Parks Department officials say it's only a matter of time before parks throughout the city are equipped with crime-fighting surveillance cameras - as many other parts of the city currently are.

"It's not a matter of if we are going to use the technology but when we are going to use this technology," Deputy Parks Commissioner Kevin Jeffrey said during a recent City Council hearing on park safety.

Jeffrey said the key issues are finding funding and the best technology available to guarantee prosecution.



WATCH OUT: Eye-in-the-sky surveillance cameras, like this one above Hudson Street, will soon be used to fight crime in city parks.

The comments came after Council Minority Leader James Oddo (R-SI) said the city is missing opportunities to seriously crack down on park crime by not taking advantage of video-surveillance technology.

He said he understands some communities might be against the idea of being recorded in parks, but Staten Islanders overwhelmingly support it.

Oddo said if the city wants to conduct a pilot program, three excellent borough locations are Westerleigh Park, Bloomingdale Park and New Dorp Park.

Assistant NYPD Commissioner Susan Petito said cameras are excellent deterrents to crime but could not estimate when she believed cameras would be installed in parks.

But not everyone is enamored with the plan.

"The assumption that cameras will solve all our problems is deeply misguided," said Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union.

"While they might be appropriate in some sections of some parks, there needs to be a commitment to protecting the privacy of individuals on romantic trysts and athletes whose bumbling might be captured on tape."

There were 65 felony crimes in the city's 20 largest parks in the third quarter of 2007, compared to 68 in the second quarter, the NYPD says.

However, park advocates say the data is flawed because there is so much crime that goes unreported - particularly misdemeanor crimes like illegal dumping.

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