



PHOTO BY ERIC KRAUSHAR

A private security camera keeps an eye on the neighborhood. Residential surveillance systems such as doorbell cameras have increased the solvability of crimes, according to area law enforcement.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

How doorbell cameras have aided law enforcement

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The popularity of doorbell cameras has grown rapidly over the last several years and now hundreds of thousands of home surveillance systems keep an eye on backyards, front doorsteps and residential streets.

Doorbell cameras let homeowners know when their package has arrived or who stopped by while they were at work, but the cameras have also provided video surveillance that has aided in law enforcement investigations.

ANOTHER RESOURCE

The cameras haven't solved any big crimes locally, Scott County Sheriff Luke Hennen said, but they have helped nail down when a crime occurred or made law enforcement aware of what vehicle a suspect was driving.

"It's kind of like all technology, it doesn't solve all problems but it's another resource that we may use," Hennen said.

In more urban areas, the cameras may be helpful as they can more easily catch footage of neighboring houses since homes are closer together. But for the sheriff's office who's responsible for patrolling the townships, the distance between homes makes capturing relevant footage a bit more challenging. Still, the cameras have proved to be a good resource for pointing officers in the right direction, Hennen said.

Doorbell camera footage is most often used in cases of burglary or as law enforcement calls them "porch pirates," Carver County Sheriff Jason Kamerud said.

"I'm aware that we have identified some of those and I'm aware of some campaign sign theft and vandalism that were captured on trail cams," Kamerud said.

Deputies and detectives typically talk with neighbors as part of the general canvassing process they conduct in an investigation, but it's now more common to inquire about surveillance footage, Hennen said.

Footage may provide a still image of a vehicle or suspect which can then be shared with neighbors or surrounding communities to gather more information.

"A lot of law enforcement's ability to solve crimes is sharing information with neighbors," Hennen said.

NEIGHBORLY HELP

Relationships between neighbors are valuable to police work, he added, as knowing your neighbors patterns and vehicles can tip you off to suspicious activity that may be taking place.

Hennen mentioned a case he worked on previously in which a burglar went to a neighbor's house and asked to borrow a ladder to get into the victim's home. The neighbor provided the burglar with a ladder because they didn't know their neighbor well and assumed the burglar was a contractor.

A positive aspect of the growing popularity of doorbell cameras is that they have increased residents' involvement in the policing process, Hennen and Kamerud agreed.

"I always tell community members you see DNA, fingerprints all these magical things solve a crime within an hour and real police work, about 80% of it, is the actual community member. Having their support and them coming forward telling us what they've seen or heard. Being our eyes or ears. DNA and fingerprints don't solve a lot of cases," Hennen said. "The DNA is only valuable if you have someone to tie it to. You need that engagement from the community to solve crimes."

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