

To: Madison Public Library Board
Date: June 30, 2010
From: Carol Froistad

Subject: Review of Video Surveillance at the Central Library

The Library Board, Nov 6, 2008, authorized the installation of video cameras at entrance and exit areas of the Central Library. The Board asked for a review of the program after six months. Installation of the cameras took nearly a year and was accomplished with the help of City IS, Madison Broadband, and the Library's technician, John Schmidt. The cameras have been operational since the end of November 2009, and staff have come to rely on them to fairly enforce the Library's Behavior Policy.

The pictures have been much more useful than the previous generic descriptions, often of clothing, on which we previously relied to identify people who'd exhibited problem behaviors. In the first 6 months, 40 pictures were captured and saved by staff as public documents in accordance with City Ordinance, 08-00093.

Most of our problem behaviors are committed by a relatively small number of people. Enabling all staff to know who these customers are, their previous behavior issues, and previous bans helps us deal consistently and fairly with them. Video images are stored for 96 hours (4 days) on a City server unless needed to identify someone or record a specific incident.

Pictures have reduced arguments for staff and the public. Someone isn't likely to deny that they're the one who was drunk or who set off the alarm with stolen material when we have a picture of them at the time. Staff also aren't trying to take a picture of someone during an incident, which can quickly escalate the situation. We know we can capture a picture of them as they leave.

We have no record of any public complaints about the cameras. Circulation staff didn't recall any offhand comments that might have been made but not reported. We have been careful to ensure that the cameras do not take pictures of people checking out materials or picking up their holds. A few customers involved in incidents elsewhere in the library have assumed we have more video cameras and want us to use them to prove that they weren't the ones at fault.

A series of pictures, which show someone threatening a staff member, are being used in a court case supporting the staff member's testimony. The police were also able to use pictures from our entrance camera to identify both the guilty parties and the innocent one in a fight that broke out on our patio before we opened. One party claimed to be trying to break the fight up, and the pictures supported his statement.

Staff appreciates the help that these cameras give us as we try to ensure that the Central Library is a welcoming place for all.