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San Diego Sheriff's Office to Unveil Surveillance Network

The new nine-camera system will be mounted on poles in some of Lemon Grove's public parks and at a busy intersection as part of the SafeSanDiego-Lemon Grove program. Footage will be accessible to deputies in real time.

BY KAREN PEARLMAN, THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE / SEPTEMBER 8, 2020



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(TNS) — By the end of this month, Lemon Grove will become the pilot site for a video surveillance program called "SafeSanDiego-Lemon Grove."

Under the new system, nine cameras will be mounted on poles in some of the city's public parks and at a busy intersection. The San Diego County Sheriff's Department is footing the cost and so far has spent about \$35,000.

Lemon Grove Sheriff's Lt. Mike Rand recently told the City Council the program will allow shared data to be entered in real time, allowing deputies in the field to get immediate video access and plan on the most appropriate response to a crime in progress.

"SafeSanDiego-Lemon Grove" is expected to improve law enforcement by reinforcing community policing, increasing officer safety, reducing victimization in the city, shortening investigations and helping it gain insight into previously unreported crimes. It can be used with other technology such as gunshot detection, incident mapping and crime analysis and other analytical systems.

The department built five camera housings for a total of nine "high profile" cameras with blinking LED strobe lights. They will be placed at Promenade Park, Berry Street Park, Lemon Grove Park, at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Broadway, and at Firefighters Skate Park.

A few residents have expressed concerns about privacy issues related to the cameras.

"The minute I heard about cameras my concern was, 'Why?'," said Steven Browne, who runs Courtesy TV in Lemon Grove. "If it really is for safety, then, yes, I'm interested. But what concerns me is if it becomes watching everything. Is the registration on our car not paid for? Is a kid jaywalking?"

"What and who is watching? Who is recording? Where are they putting them? Are they all of a sudden going to be everywhere? Where are they keeping and storing the images?"

Rand said the site on the street is not a "red-light camera," nor is it equipped to determine speed of vehicles.

In order to ensure proper use of SafeSanDiego-Lemon Grove, the Sheriff's Department created a special policy. In general, the policy says that the use of a video integration system in any public area "must balance the need to protect the safety of our communities, while ensuring that the public's right to privacy is safeguarded."

The policy says that all employees using or accessing the system will be trained and aware of the "need to safeguard the privacy rights of the public" and that use of the system "for personal or voyeuristic purposes is a violation of this policy and strictly prohibited."

Along with the sheriff's cameras, local businesses using security systems with video — if they are interested in doing so — will be able to partner with the Sheriff's Department to provide public safety officials access to their images. Participating businesses can choose which specific cameras they will provide access to and in what capacity those cameras can be viewed, allowing for autonomy and control over their system. Thus far, one business has agreed to be part of the program.

Rand said Lemon Grove is "the busiest station in the county of San Diego."

According to the Sheriff's Department, in 2019, Lemon Grove deputies handled 13,015 calls for service and made 6,785 deputy-initiated contacts. Of those calls for service and contacts, deputies arrested 1,207 individuals. On average, deputies responded to 36 calls for service per day and made 22 self-initiated contacts per day last year.

Rand said that while the program is debuting in Lemon Grove, it will move into other cities and county areas.

Lemon Grove was chosen for the pilot program not because of crime rates, which are at a 20-year low, but because of its small geographic area and force of just 15

deputies assigned to the city's substation.

The department has seen an increase in some crimes over the last five years in Lemon Grove, with a noticeable uptick in theft related crimes. Rand said much of the increase in theft has been from retail businesses along the Broadway corridor.

According to the latest reported crime statistics from 2019 in Lemon Grove as shared by San Diego Association of Governments:

Total property crimes per 1,000 residents: 20.29 (17 percent increase from 2018); Total crime rate per 1,000 residents: 26.43 (15 percent increase from 2018); Total violent crimes per 1,000 residents: 6.14 (7 percent increase from 2018); Total crimes per jurisdiction: 719 (15 percent increase from 2018).

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