

Pinhole Cameras at Cheung Sha Wan Post Office (CSW)

1. Background

- CCTV is a standard provision in all sorting centres and some delivery offices and counter offices, including CSW. The purpose is to ensure office security and mail security, and to monitor postal operations. Staff are aware of such installations.
- Between September 2004 and February 2005, six cases of suspected theft occurred in CSW, with high denomination stamps on postal packets peeled off. We started reporting to Police in October 2004.
- After discussions with the Police, the Post Office (PO) installed six pinhole cameras in staff working areas in January 2005 as an extension of the existing CCTV system. Other alternatives have been considered/tried out but were found infeasible/ineffective.
- Staff were not informed of the pinhole cameras as the purpose of the installation was to identify the culprit.

2. Operation of the pinhole cameras

The PO has followed the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data's "Privacy Guidelines : Monitoring and Personal Data Privacy at Work" in the installation and use of the pinhole cameras as follows :

- Cameras are only installed at targeted locations in the working areas, not in toilets, changing room or locker room [location of cameras C11 to C16 indicated in attached office layout].
- Pinhole cameras are not for real time monitoring. Recordings are viewed only after theft case recurs. Viewing, if required, is proceeded by login by a password in the sole custody of the Postmaster.
- There is a log in record in the CCTV system to keep track of all log-ins into the system so that all incidents of viewing recordings of pinhole cameras are traceable in the system.
- The system has a limited capacity (about 2 to 4 weeks). When it is exceeded, old footages will be automatically erased and replaced by new footages. No permanent record is kept.

- The use of pinhole cameras in CSW was an isolated arrangement due to very rare and special circumstances. The devices have been disabled.

For the purpose of forming a view on the issue, the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data is collecting detailed information about the case.

3. Staff Sentiment

- PO has long been committed to open internal communication to work towards delivering superior service to the community. As a result of intensive communication efforts since 18 June 2005, PO staff are now made aware of the very special and rare circumstances under which the pinhole cameras in CSW were installed, and the measures PO has taken to protect privacy. They (including staff of CSW) generally feel relieved and show understanding of the PO position.