

Redlands police airplane to be equipped with video camera

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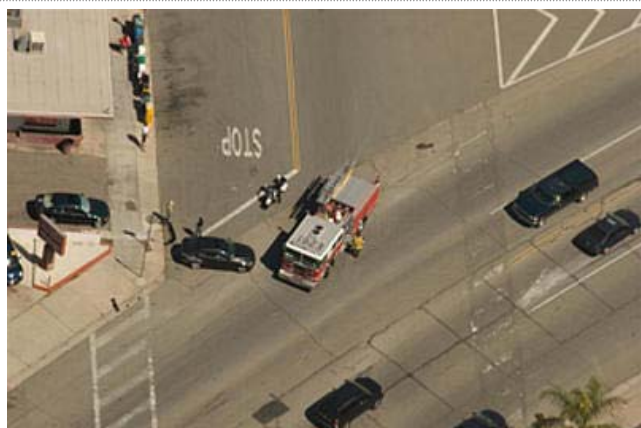
By JAN SEARS
The Press-Enterprise

Another surveillance camera is being added to the city's array of more than 50 -- this one in the Redlands Police Department's airplane.

The City Council last week approved spending nearly \$50,000 from a federal grant to operate a video camera in Air-10, the plane the department uses for surveillance, pursuits and other operations.

The airplane's surveillance camera will be capable of collecting video and sending it to the police dispatch center via an installation on top of the Citibank building at 7th and State streets. The department has permission to set up equipment on top of the building, which is the tallest in town, Commander Tom Fitzmaurice said.

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At first, the airborne camera will only be able to send video when it's within about 2 miles of the bank building, but ultimately the department expects to be able to expand the wireless system so that it can send from anywhere in town, Fitzmaurice said.

Eventually it will be able to send video to individual patrol cars, Police Chief Jim Bueermann said.

The department is working with **Leverage** Information Inc. to develop the video system.

At the meeting Councilman Mick Gallagher said he wasn't necessarily comfortable with police flying a camera-equipped airplane over his backyard.

"But then I decided that we don't have anything to hide anyway," he said.

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The video camera will be installed in Air-10, which is used for surveillance, pursuits and other operations.

Bueermann said the plane is not used to spy on people, and that helicopters operated by the sheriff's department and other agencies have "much more powerful optics than we would have." He said the surveillance cameras, which cover downtown, city parks and schools, allow the department to do more with fewer officers.

By this summer, as many as 100 cameras could be in use. They are paid for with grants and asset seizure funds, Bueermann said.

"Let me be very clear. The only general fund money we spend on this program is for the police officer that we would be paying for if he was on the ground or in the air," he told the council.

The airplane is flown by a group of 30 volunteer pilots, some of whom work for other law enforcement agencies, Fitzmaurice said.

Their time is scheduled so that the plane is available anytime during daylight hours, he said.

"We couldn't do half of what we do without volunteers," Fitzmaurice said.

Because of Redlands' financial problems, the department has 18 vacant officer positions. The city's police have had no headquarters building since Safety Hall was condemned for structural problems in 2008. The city has not yet made a decision on a permanent home for the department.

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