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## Agency News

# TDCJ installs additional comprehensive video surveillance systems

**I**nstallation of comprehensive video surveillance systems at three TDCJ correctional facilities is nearing completion, further enhancing security as well as staff, visitor and offender safety.

The 81st through 83rd Texas Legislatures allocated a total of \$30 million in funding over the last five years for the installation of comprehensive video systems on ten prison units. In addition to the three units where installation is nearing completion, five correctional facilities already have fully functional systems, and installation is underway at two additional units.

Many TDCJ facilities have security cameras and more limited video surveillance systems, but enhanced technology allows comprehensive video surveillance to cover nearly the entire unit, including the perimeter, housing areas, dining halls, unit chapels and other places where offenders congregate. Some mounted cameras pan, tilt and zoom to better observe a subject. Correctional Institutions Division administrators can view surveillance footage from their office or other viewing stations. CID's Security Operations

Department provides technical and operational support, and the Video Surveillance and Video Equipment/Production Section helps maintain existing surveillance systems, while providing technical evaluations for augmentation and improvement.

Since their installation, the new video systems have revealed attempts to introduce contraband into a prison facility, including narcotics being passed in a bag of chips and contraband hidden in a vendor's vehicle, help resolve allegations of offender or staff misbehavior, and distinguish instigators, assailants, victims and bystanders during disturbances and altercations. Video footage has also helped identify opportunities to improve existing security procedures. Although their value in deterring criminal acts and serious policy violations cannot be documented, the comprehensive video surveillance systems make it more likely individuals will be caught, which helps deter would-be violators.



**TDCJ Surveillance System Coordinator Albert Courtney, right, discusses installation procedures for the comprehensive video surveillance system with Project Manager Lex Carrell at the Michael Unit in Tennessee Colony.**

Commenting on the comprehensive video systems' effect on security, Deputy Director of Prisons and Jail Operations Robert Eason explained, "Comprehensive video surveillance is an important tool which allows us to monitor and record offender activities, makes it harder to defeat unit security measures and allows us to monitor staff to help ensure their safety. We need to take advantage of every opportunity to reduce

*Continued on page 2*

*Continued from page 1*

contraband, and surveillance discourages most people from even attempting to introduce it into a secure facility.”

Although comprehensive video surveillance is an effective management tool, no technology provides an effective substitute for the presence of correctional staff directly supervising offenders. “It is dedicated and vigilant staff, assisted by appropriate technology, that make TDCJ’s correctional facilities safe and secure,” Eason added, “and without safety and security none of our success in rehabilitation and reducing recidivism would be possible.”

Further acquisition and installation of comprehensive video surveillance systems is in the planning stages. Earlier this year the 84th Legislature appropriated funds that will enable the agency to add surveillance systems to three additional units. ●



**Coffield Unit Warden John Rupert, left, discusses camera operations with Unit Surveillance Sergeant Gary Guthrie. CID administrators are able to view movement throughout the unit using mounted video monitors.**