

# “Stop CCTV growth” call by expert

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“The number of CCTV cameras in Britain is so large that installing any more should be halted until their need is proven”, an expert has said.

Prof Nigel Gilbert made the plea after his report into privacy and surveillance, published by the Royal Academy of Engineering, raised the spectre of ‘Big Brother Britain’.

Mr Gilbert warned: “The number of surveillance cameras in Britain is now so large that maybe we should call it to a halt, unless there is a compelling reason to install more.”

“More research was needed to find out whether the benefits of CCTV were outweighed by the potential intrusion into people’s lives”, he said.

Organisations which collect data about people should be more transparent about what information they are collecting and why, he added.

Prof Gilbert’s study also recommended that every adult in Britain should be given a free annual report about information held about their credit position, rather than having to pay for access.

He said: “One of the worst things that can happen is if confidential data becomes available to people it shouldn’t, such as hackers.”

“Once data has escaped, it is almost impossible to get the genie back in the bottle – it can be copied and copied again and sold all over the Internet. In California, credit companies have to inform people annually about the information they are storing about them. I would like to see that in Britain too.”

Prof Gilbert said he was also concerned about CCTV being watched on the Internet for voyeuristic or ‘more sinister’ reasons.

Terrorists could spend hours watching footage to work out the best locations for setting off a bomb to cause the maximum casualties.

While criminals could work at their leisure in the privacy of their own homes trying to find weaknesses in a business’s security systems.

Responding to the report, Shami Chakrabarti, director of Liberty, said: “Without personal privacy there can be no dignity, intimacy or trust.”

“As ordinary people wake up to this threat from the public and private sector it is both good politics and sound business to take their concerns on board.”

The Home Office said they would “study the report with interest”.