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## 50 cameras, 10 speakers around town

### *Hoboken gets first-of-its-kind security system*

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*Reporter staff writer*

The Office of Emergency Management and a technology company called PackeTalk are working on another Hoboken first: the first city-wide wireless audio/visual system in the country.

Right now, law enforcement officials are already using more than 50 cameras around town to gather criminal intelligence, and they are testing a companion community alert loud-speaker system.

A total of 75 wireless locations have been set up to handle both functions by PackeTalk, a company founded in 2004 and based in Hoboken. While PackeTalk did not install the cameras, they created the wireless network that will link them to each other and to the speakers. The locations leave room for future expansion should the system prove useful and should the city have more funds.

Originally, the entire project was priced at \$100,000, but OEM officials say costs may end up closer to \$200,000.

Tamer Zakhary, the CEO of PackeTalk, said the system is the first of its kind for a municipality. He has worked with companies and schools to set up similar networks, but never city-wide. Most recently, they installed a wireless network in a building in Brooklyn. They also have installed networks in Weehawken, Passaic and East Orange.



**EYE IN THE SKY** – Police and the Office of Emergency Management have set up over 50 cameras throughout the city to help with law enforcement. The high-powered cameras can read a newspaper headline in the hands of these PATH travelers.

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The live-feed video system can easily read the license plate of a car in front of the PATH station from a Hudson Place rooftop camera, as Zakhary demonstrated in the command center at police headquarters last week.

Office of Emergency Management Coordinator and Police Captain James Fitzsimmons called the new system the most important project he has dealt with as OEM coordinator.

The speakers are already operational, and after a few more testing sessions, they will be used in the event of an emergency. They will not be used for school closings and non-emergency functions, officials said.

#### Can you hear me now?

The OEM team is currently working to adjust the decibel levels on the speakers. The system allows OEM officials to target messages to different areas of the city in order to provide localized information in the event of a crisis. It also allows coordinators to securely log-in from a remote laptop to access the public address system and send out communications.

Zakhary said the security of the system is second to none.

"It cannot be compromised," Zakhary said while listing the various methods of encrypting and securing the system, including fingerprint recognition software.

Although an absolute assurance of network security is impossible, he said this is as close as it gets.

One of the key components of the system is that it does not rely on an external infrastructure like an internet service provider or telecom company, and therefore will not be affected by a systems crash at critical times.

The company instead built its own, independent network from the ground up.

"If you rely on a network that's not yours, you're at the will of others," Zakhary said.

He added, "On 9/11, calls didn't get through. They may have lost hundreds of people due to a reliance on telecom companies."

Fitzsimmons repeated a line Zakhary had used early on in the long process of working on the system: "I'd rather be a smart second, than a dumb first."

The actual speaker and camera units are also very durable, able to withstand hurricane-force weather.

### Big brother

Zakhary said he has heard complaints from residents before about the "big brother" aspect of the security cameras. He referred to a study done by East Orange, NJ shortly after installing security cameras through out the city. According to the study, the town saw a 56 percent drop in crime over a three-year period due to increased intelligence-gathering of criminal activities.

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"In times of chaos, people need to be informed."

- James Fitzsimmons

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East Orange also installed acoustic gunshot-detection sensors synchronized with the surveillance cameras, as well as a group of selected residents who participated in a Virtual Community Patrol from their home computers.

### Text messages from the city

Another component of the plan is an emergency response system that can contact residents by cell phone, home phone, text message, e-mail, or even by internet phone - a service called "voice over IP," or VoIP.

"This is equally, if not more, important aspect of the plan," Fitzsimmons said.

The software for the program is in place, and now OEM personnel are trying to compile and verify contact information for the more than 55,000 residents, according to OEM.

The system can alert residents in an emergency to give them a better understanding of an ongoing situation.

Fitzsimmons said, "In times of chaos, people need to be informed. Sharing information is the best thing you can do.

" Zakhary said the system will be able to dispatch multi-media messages, like audio, video, and pictures.

The capabilities may come in handy in the future, Fitzsimmons said. For instance, if the police have an Amber Alert, they can include a picture of the missing child in a city-wide text message.

For residents who want to add cellular phone numbers, unpublished numbers, e-mail addresses, and other information, the city has created a web portal they will use to collect contact information.

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Jillian Michaels

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