

# Ogden camera network credited for cutting crime by 20%

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KSL TV

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**10PM: Ogden camera network credited for cutting crime by 20%**  
**Dan Rascon, KSL TV**

OGDEN — Ogden's new police chief has a unique battle plan to fight crime in his city. For decades, Ogden has struggled with an image of a city troubled by crime. But Chief Randy Watt, himself a 30-year veteran, is using his military intelligence skills to fight crime in a whole new way.

The city uses what it calls a "Real-Time Crime Center." Unlike a typical police operation center, it's a room full of TV monitors where analysts can pull up maps of crime, maps of probationers and parolees. It's an extensive network of publicly and privately owned cameras — 1,200 in all. The cameras allow analysts to dig through crime trends and provide information to officers the same day. They can see what neighborhoods are having problems, which people to talk to, what time of day, and day of the week a patrol officer should be in the area.

They can also pull up the network of cameras to search through footage for an investigation or track a crime in real time as it's occurring. This allows them to direct officers on the street where to go and what to expect.



*The "Real Time Crime Center" is a room full of TV monitors where analysts can pull up maps of crime, maps of probationers and parolees, and an extensive network of publicly and privately owned cameras. Photo: KSL TV*

### **Fighting crime with technology**

Watt doesn't just want to pinpoint where the crime is happening throughout his city. He hopes the system will one day help predict where the crime will happen.

"It will tell us today where to be tomorrow," Watt said.

Watt and former Ogden Police Chief Jon Greiner decided to create the center in 2008 after seeing a similar operation in New York City. The Real-Time Crime Center opened in July of 2011. Watt said after he and Greiner left the department that year, the department was not as focused on data-based policing. When Watt returned as chief in 2017, he made the center a priority and increased the center's staff from two employees to seven.

He's using it to improve decisions on where his officers need to be and what they should be focused on. He credits the center for Ogden's reported crimes dropping nearly 20 percent between 2017 and 2018 — 4,519 versus 3,627.

"I directly attribute the Real-Time Crime Center and their data analysis to our very successful so far, reduction in crime," Watt said.

A prime example: the entertainment district along 25th Street.

"We're still untamed a little bit," said bar owner Jared Allen.

Allen owns Alleged, a business at the corner of Lincoln and 25th. A police camera is mounted right across the street from his front entrance.

"Having that camera across the street is great for us," Allen said.

Last summer, the Real-Time Crime Center identified 25th Street as a trouble spot, so the chief re-instituted a foot patrol in the area.

"The patrol officers on the street make all the difference. That's what I've seen," said Tommy Clark, owner of Lighthouse Lounge.

By winter, Watt said crime had fallen and he redeployed the officers elsewhere.

"That very night, one of the business owners noticed and immediately called the city administrator on his cellphone asking, 'Where is my foot patrol?'" Watt said.

Weber County School district has also given officers access to its cameras in case there is an active shooter situation.

### **Privacy concerns?**

While residents out enjoying a Friday evening told KSL TV they had no problems with the cameras, the Utah chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union raised some concerns.

"What are we giving up and how are we benefitting?" said Leah Farrell, senior staff attorney. "Generally, it's been shown that this kind of blanket surveillance isn't effective."

She said the ACLU has had issues with some of Ogden's attempts to fight crime. In 2011, the city made plans to launch a surveillance blimp to help fight crime; the plan never fully materialized.



“It absolutely warrants discussion by the policymakers and wider discussion with the community to invite them in, to talk about the cost both monetarily and to their privacy,” Farrell said.

Watt dismissed the concerns, noting the city’s cameras are on public property and looking at public spaces. The feeds are recorded, but deleted after 30 days. He’s focused on fighting crime and turning around Ogden’s years-long perception.

“That’s the challenge I have is the perception of crime. Ogden has this reputation that has far outlived the reality of crime in the city,” Watt said.