

WORKPLACE | With companies monitoring where their employees go, both online and off, workers are **SURRENDERING PRIVACY** for safety.

## YOU'RE BEING WATCHED

**S**URVEILLANCE technology is falling in price and increasing in sophistication, and the number of employers who monitor their employees electronically is rising dramatically.

Two-thirds of large employers monitor e-mail and Internet use, according to a survey by the American Management Association. Half of the surveyed companies have disciplined or terminated staff for violating the company's e-mail and Internet policies.

ILLUSTRATION BY TRISHA KRAUSS

Employers insist they're not snooping. They're just trying to ward off lawsuits fueled by "smoking gun" e-mails, improve productivity and ensure the workplace is not a hostile environment.

Since September 11, they're also trying to keep employees safe and vital data secure. "When you take the events of that day and couple them with layoffs and disgruntled employees who didn't get a raise or bonus, it really broadens the potential for computer sabotage by employees, ex-employees or terrorist groups," says Nancy Flynn, author of *The ePolicy Handbook*.

There's increased interest among employers in smart cards that not only control access to a building but also keep tabs on employees' whereabouts throughout the day, and in the use of thumbprints and other biometrics to manage access to data files.

**Long memories.** Today's technological capabilities are analogous to "a tape recorder by the water cooler, where you can keep the tape for five years and search it by key word," says Andrew Schulman, chief researcher for the Privacy Foundation's workplace surveillance project. Nevertheless, "there will generally be a willingness among employees to give a little more on the privacy continuum to gain a little more on the security side," predicts William Hubbart, author of

*The New Battle Over Workplace Privacy.*

Even before September 11, a growing number of employers were monitoring e-mail and flagging key words that could warn firms about possible sexual harassment or corporate espionage. Now companies are including a new lexicon of watched words, such as *bioterrorism*, *anthrax* and *bombs*.

Employers don't necessarily want to ban all personal Web surfing, says Andy Meyer of Websense, which makes software used by half of the Fortune 500 companies. Some companies block access to gambling and pornography sites but allow a certain amount of time per day for employees to visit, say, personal-finance or shopping sites. Other firms monitor activity at job-search sites, which could signal management problems in a particular department.

**Your rights.** Employers have a legal right to monitor employees, and employees should not expect privacy, says Flynn. But workers do have the right to be notified about how they're being monitored, and many companies fall short. She recommends that companies have a written policy signed by employees and kept on file.

A few employers use log-on screens that ask employees to accept the company's policy before they can be granted access to the system.

Curious about how your own employer is watching you? "Ask your information-technology guy," advises Schulman.