

Amazon AI Van Cameras Spark ‘Dystopia Prime’ Concerns



It's billed as "the largest expansion of corporate surveillance in human history." As a thoroughly Technocratic organization, if Amazon's were to rule over society, it would closely resemble Orwell's dystopian 1984. □
TN Editor

Amazon.com Inc's announcement this week that it would be rolling out AI-powered cameras in its branded delivery vans for safety has drawn criticism from privacy advocates and workers concerned with being subjected to surveillance on the job.

The world's largest e-commerce firm said the cameras, which are developed by transportation technology company Netradyne, would improve safety of both drivers and the communities in which they deliver.

But employees like Henry Search, a 22-year-old delivery driver in Washington state, said they saw cameras capturing their work day as an "invasion of privacy".

"We are out here working all day, trying our best already," Search told

the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a phone interview. “The cameras are just another way to control us.”

Privacy advocates warned that equipping Amazon’s fleet of about 30,000 delivery vehicles with AI cameras could set a dangerous precedent for privacy.

“This appears to be the largest expansion of corporate surveillance in human history,” said Evan Greer, deputy director of tech nonprofit Fight for the Future. “If this becomes the norm, we are talking about the extinction of human privacy.”

Amazon has come under scrutiny in the past for accidents involving delivery drivers.

A company spokeswoman said in emailed comments that “this technology will provide drivers real-time alerts to help them stay safe when they are on the road.”

In an instructional video about the cameras, Amazon’s senior manager for last-mile safety Karolina Haraldsdottir said cameras will record 100% of the time, but are not set up to livestream from inside of vans.

They will detect unsafe driving, including when drivers appear distracted or drowsy, she explained, adding that the footage could be used by the company’s safety team, or in investigations of theft or accidents.

But Greer said that safety issues could be addressed by slowing the pace of work. “The first thing they (Amazon) should do to improve safety would be not have such outrageous delivery quotas that force people into unsafe conditions,” she said.

Another driver in Massachusetts, who asked not to use his name to protect his identity, said he would welcome a camera displayed outside his van to record evidence for any accident.

“But a camera on my face all the time, I don’t see how that keeps me safe - it’s too much,” he said in a phone interview, noting that drivers already use an app called Mentor that tracks the location and

movements of the vehicle.

Haraldsdottir said that “only a limited set of authorized people” would have access to driver footage from the cameras.

But some drivers worried Amazon might sell or share the footage with third parties, or use the cameras to monitor their performance on the job.

“The footage recorded could be shared with a future possible employer who can then decide to reject you before even knowing you,” said one driver from Michigan who asked not to give his full name.

Although he enjoys doing deliveries for Amazon, he said he is currently looking for other work because he does not want to be subjected to surveillance.

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