

SURVIVING SURVEILLANCE IN PRISON

STAYING CONNECTED
IN THE FIGHT FOR
LIBERATION



THIS ZINE is about surviving (and evading) prison surveillance technology. However, technology is only part of the total surveillance project that is prison itself. Violating privacy—in real-life, daily ways—is a foundation of prison, used to dehumanize, control, and punish. Adding to the brutality, prison technology companies reap billions in profit off the backs of the poor.

This zine takes a practical, harm-reduction approach to understanding the risks of the technologies used to communicate with family, friends and comrades.

"Conventional wisdom would have one believe that it is insane to resist this, the mightiest of empires, but what history really shows is that today's empire is tomorrow's ashes; that nothing lasts forever, and that to not resist is to acquiesce in your own oppression. The greatest form of sanity that anyone can exercise is to resist that force that is trying to repress, oppress, and fight down the human spirit." —MUMIA ABU JAMAL

RAM's security zines, *Know Your Enemy*, *Your Phone Is A Snitch*, and *Surviving Surveillance in Prison* are practical guides to navigating safety in a police state.

For further reading, ask us to send you RAM's text *Burn Down the American Plantation*.

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PHONE Every call made from a jail or prison phone is recorded and saved. The technology uses both *speech* and *speaker* recognition – meaning they want to know what's being said, and who is saying it. Calls are screened using software that flags certain words (and certain voices), and those flags can bring a live investigator onto the call, unbeknownst to the callers.

The system detects who the incarcerated caller is based on voice training done at intake. Callers on the outside can shield their identity by using a phone that's unattached to their name or credit card. But be aware, location tracking occurs on outside phones during a call, and for one hour after the call ends.

Using slang, other languages, or codes can help keep conversations private, but know that the prison will try to learn and make records of new language being used. Be careful with private information, but keep sharing words of love and power with your people.

CELL PHONES It's simply a fact that cell phones make their way into prisons. Whether they're used to report on conditions, or as a cheaper alternative to prison phone rates, they can be a valuable tool but also a risk. The same telecom companies that run most phone services also offer prisons "stingray" services to find cell phones and analyze whatever data is extractable from intercepted phones.

Just like phones outside, using an encrypted messaging app such as Signal is the best way to communicate securely, especially when using the disappearing message function. A strong password is always recommended for the phone itself, on social media and messaging apps, and on encrypted email such as Protonmail. If video is used to communicate, avoid showing faces whenever possible.

When used safely, a cell phone can be a connector, broadcaster, a critical lifeline, a match and a spark.

LETTERS Almost all prison mail is read by prison staff, and some is photocopied or scanned by the prison. Some DOC websites share their mail practices, but not all. A growing number of prisons are using companies like SmartCommunications to scan all incoming and outgoing mail, and scanned mail is saved in searchable databases so it can be searched across all correspondence, for keywords, names, or topics.

Typed letters are more easily saved and searched than hard-to-read handwriting, because of the use of character recognition software, but typing evades handwriting detection. Coded slang is again useful.

To keep outside addresses private, a PO Box can be set up by a trusted person and shared between multiple comrades or friends, and using aliases is essential for anonymity. Finally, attorney confidentiality and the use of legal mail is the best option for the most private conversations.

TABLETS & KIOSKS Used for money transactions, communication, entertainment and education, tablets are now common in prisons. But in addition to the predatory financial costs of most tablet services, there are other costs to privacy and human connection that come with this new technology.

Having some of the things you need in one device or kiosk can be useful, but technological convenience is a double-edged sword. A tablet can replace paper letters with easy-to-monitor email, provide a pretense to eliminate printed books, and substitute for a trip to the classroom with your peers – increasing surveillance and isolation, and decreasing movement and camaraderie. The "jails of the future" will surely push isolation, in the name of safety, to new levels. But people in prison will always find creative ways to hack their environment and improve their conditions in meaningful ways.

VIDEO VISIT Quickly increasing in use, especially since COVID, video visiting is a convenient way to see the faces you care about. What many don't know is that companies that provide video visit services are getting more and more prisons to agree to contracts to ban in-person visiting. They sell this idea with the promise of eliminating an entry point of contraband, despite the fact that most contraband comes from staff.

While attorney video visits may be protected against recording, most family visits are recorded and saved, with the same methods as phone calls, but with the added risks of face recognition software and mandatory pre-registration that is difficult to do anonymously. This creates a database of information tracking criminalized people, including children, that can be shared with other arms of law enforcement.

While recognizing technology's benefits, we must fight to be together in person. Prison abolition is a vital path to be together, safe, and free.