

A hand is shown adjusting a car's rearview mirror. The mirror's reflection shows a black silhouette of a hand on the left and a blue silhouette of a person with a camera on the right. The car's interior, including the dashboard and sunroof, is visible in the background.

WHAT THE FLOCK IS THAT?

MASS
SURVEILLANCE
AND YOU

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DESERTERS DISTRO

Run quick my dear the old wold is behind you!

ART BY JONAS GOONFACE.

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WOULD MAKE US REAL HAPPY. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK.



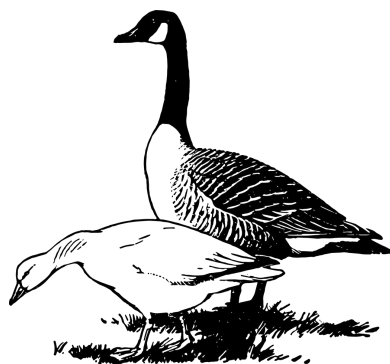
Flock? ...A flock of what? Sadly, not geese.

We've written you this zine to introduce you to the company Flock Safety. We get into what products they sell, what they cost us as taxpayers, and most importantly: the risks their model poses to you, your neighbors, friends, and family.

Flock's technology is dangerous mass-surveillance infrastructure: their profits come from logging data about our movements. This constant monitoring can deter people from exercising their freedoms, like attending protests or engaging in other forms of free expression, which should concern all of us.

Our hope is that the information in this zine helps you to educate, mobilize and act upon this vehicle of mass surveillance.

Let's resist generalized surveillance becoming commonplace!



“Our society is not one of spectacle but of surveillance.”

-Michael Foucault

What is Flock Safety?

Flock Safety is a Georgia-founded and Texas-based company who traffics in surveillance technology, infrastructure, and data. Their main operations involve installing automated license plate readers (ALPRs) along roadways at major intersections in order to collect images and data about passing cars.

They use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to manage, sort, and search that data, and sell access to that data to police departments on a subscription model. They started out selling their cameras to homeowner's associations, and later expanded to selling to police departments. They claim to be successfully surveilling 70% of the US population¹.

Flock was founded in 2017. As of 2025, Flock claims to operate in over 5,000 communities across 49 US States, and perform over 20 billion scans of vehicles every month. They were valued at \$7.5 billion USD in 2025¹.

As a company, they have a spotty track record. Some of the red flags we've noticed are:

They regularly disregard local permitting while installing cameras:

Flock has an 'ask forgiveness, not permission' attitude to getting their camera network up and running, and regularly installs and operates their cameras before completing local permits². Last year, a Forbes investigation found Flock had regularly failed to get the correct permits and licenses to deploy its devices, appearing to break a number of local laws.

They lobby for and help create favorable regulatory laws at the state government level ³ :

Flock spent \$460,000 in lobbying in the first half of 2025⁴. In Wisconsin, there were no regulations for ALPR's on public roadways before Flock showed up. Flock offered to work with WISDOT (WI Department Of Transportation) to create a regulatory process, and did so. This represents a glaring conflict of interest, and is a pattern of behavior that can be traced across several states.

They've sponsored tailored research and doctored studies:

Flock Safety published a study and press release claiming that its ALPRs are “instrumental in solving 10 percent of reported crime in the U.S.”⁶ The study was done by Flock employees and “overseen” by two paid researchers. One of the researchers, Johnny Nhan of Texas Christian University, has been critical of the study in retrospect.

Nahn told 404 media: “I personally would have done things much differently [than the Flock researchers did]”.

He found that “the information that is collected by the police departments are too varied and incomplete for us to do any type of meaningful statistical analysis on them.”⁷.



What are Flock's products?

The cameras:

Flock's cameras have a distinct look, and once you know what to look for, you'll start seeing them everywhere. The cameras are all black with a black solar panel. They're mounted on either a stop-light, light pole, or a standalone black metal pole. The cameras are usually powered by their attached solar panels, and take photos of every car that passes by: recording the license plate number, time, date, and location.

They're usually placed at hard to avoid choke points that force cars to slow down to 45 mph or less so that the cameras can capture a clear photo. The camera connects to the flock national database via cellular LTE data. This cellular connection could be vulnerable to hackers as Flock refuses to allow their cameras to be independently tested for security flaws, unlike all of Flock's major competitors⁸.

The software & database:

Flock's cameras aren't just normal license plate reader cameras — these cameras use AI to create a "unique vehicle fingerprint" based on scratches, dents, aftermarket add-ons, bumper stickers, and many other metrics. When you drive past one of these cameras, Flock takes in all this data about your car and makes an entry about you in their proprietary searchable database. Each data entry on our movements is stored for 30-90 days depending on the subscription.



The Flock network is widely available and very susceptible to misuse. It is accessible to subscribing police departments across the country, major government agencies such as the ATF, DHS, FBI and ICE, private entities such as home owners associations, and The Home Depot Corporation. The databases are also accessible to anyone with whom a user unlawfully shares their login credentials with, which is regularly happening^{9, 22}.

What does it cost?

In 2025 A single Flock camera costs \$3,000 per year, and Flock can raise the annual subscription price at will. FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests have shown very high payments from police departments to Flock. Riverside county in California, for example, has a \$6,878,750 contract with them²⁰. Police departments can receive any combination of private funding, tax-funded state grants, and start-up discounts for the initial installation¹⁴, but the yearly subscription costs and contract renewals fall to local taxpayers. **Flock effectively locks counties into dependence on a service with an ever-increasing cost.** Furthermore, police departments are liable in lawsuits from any injuries or wrongful arrests related to misuse or technical errors of Flock's technologies: those suits are paid out by taxpayers, not by Flock.

Flock has positioned themselves in our communities so quickly because they solicit our police departments directly. Most departments add Flock services to their budgets without stopping to ask the community if they want those services, or making any effort to prove a need for them. Flock tells small town police that their services will rapidly solve crime, and even stop crime before it happens. There's no data to support this claim— it's a fantasy that you and I pay for.

Why should I care?

“We thought we were doing the same things we'd always done because the changes happened in slow motion, but happen they did, and when we looked out the window we were someplace else.”

— Diane di Prima, *Memoirs of a Beatnik*

They never asked us if we want this!

When new technology comes into our daily lives, we deserve an opportunity to discuss whether we want it or not. Without that opportunity, we're like frogs in hot water: we don't know we're being boiled alive until it's too late. Companies like Flock would love nothing more than for us to accept that it's natural that our comings and goings will be tracked, but it isn't!

Here are some questions we'd like folks who are noticing new cameras in their towns to ask each other:

- Was public discussion held before those cameras were installed? What kind of public discussion do we need to see before our town buys cameras like these?
- Who will have oversight on how that system is used, and who accesses it?
- What is the process if a problem occurs?
- Do we feel we can trust our current police staff with this powerful tech? (Even if you like the current sheriff, one day there will be a new sheriff in town!)

You have a legal right to privacy!

- So long as your state has no laws against ALPR's, a subscribing police department in another state can run your plates from their office and see where your car has been, anywhere in the Flock network.
- Mass surveillance of vehicles through the Flock network circumvents traditional warrant processes: police can look up all movements of any license plate at will, at an unprecedented scale, with no oversight on probable cause.

- There is low-to-no oversight on how police search Flock's database, which raises major concerns about their legality under the Fourth Amendment (this is currently being litigated in court¹⁵).
- The vehicle fingerprinting that Flock performs allows searches by political bumper stickers down to specific wording, which poses serious threats to folks' First Amendment rights²¹.

"But I never do anything illegal, I don't care if all my movements are tracked!"

From deflock.me:

"You don't get to decide what looks suspicious tomorrow. Just because you're not doing anything wrong today doesn't mean you won't be watched tomorrow. License plate cameras like Flock don't know your intentions—only your movements. A trip to a protest, a friend's house in a “high-crime” area, or even a misread plate can flag you as “suspicious.” As history has shown, when governments or third parties gain unchecked surveillance powers, they're eventually used against people who weren't doing anything wrong—until someone decided they were. For example, until early in 2025, ALPRs weren't used for tracking immigrants, legal or otherwise, but now they are, *despite* policies prohibiting it."

"They already know everything there is to know about me!"

It might feel like making a massive digital footprint is a fact of life, but so much of our public / private landscape is brand new: mass adoption of online life is less than 30 years old! Governing bodies **don't** currently know everything about us, and in the past gathering data about our lives was so important to the FBI that they spent billions illegally tracing social networks. Privacy is the backbone of dignity and autonomy: don't give that up!

Misuse & Social Cost

Can we trust our police with this technology?

We don't think it's all right for our police departments to make unquestioned decisions for us, like unilaterally purchasing a Flock subscription. Many communities have longstanding mistrust of police. Modern social movements against police brutality highlight the reasons behind that lack of trust, and we encourage you to read more about those perspectives if they're new to you. One of the facets of police brutality is domestic violence. Unfortunately, police officers committing domestic violence is a well-documented occurrence. From writer Andrew Burmon at Fatherly.com:

"Though data on police domestic violence is not only notoriously difficult to gather but also skewed by a culture of silence and intimidation, [the data] suggests that police officers in the United States perpetrate acts of domestic violence at roughly 15 times the rate of the general population."

The relative lack of oversight in how police use Flock technologies bodes poorly for victims and survivors of police domestic violence. There have already been 2 reported cases of police officers using the technology to stalk their ex-partners. In Sedgwick, Kansas, the police chief used Flock's database to track his ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend's vehicles 228 times over a 5 month period¹⁰. In another instance, Police Lieutenant Victor Heiar in Kechi, Kansas utilized Flock's database to monitor where his estranged wife was located¹¹.

We flag this concern not to paint all police with the same brush, but to name that something goes wrong when people are given power over other people, and police domestic violence is a systemic problem. When people in power abuse that power, it is better to not give them more tools to do harm.

What about when the technology fails?

Misreads and misinterpretations of license plate data have already had dire consequences for innocent people. Drivers have been held at gunpoint, attacked by K9s or falsely arrested due to these errors¹².

Flock has many strong claims about the efficacy of their products, but industry stress testing tells another story. According to research published by IPVM—a security and surveillance industry research group—Flock's cameras misread the name of the issuing state on 1-in-10 license plates. The researchers also found the readers logged the same car in the same place multiple times, misattributed vehicle characteristics, and that the make or model of the car was regularly incorrect. Shortly after the report was issued, Flock stopped selling its readers to IPVM for testing.

What about Immigration and Customs Enforcement?

In a recent blunder, members of law enforcement and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) inadvertently added a random person to a group chat called “Mass Text” where they were using ALPRs in real time to track down people targeted for their migration status¹⁶. This inadvertent exposure shows us how this technology specifically is being used against migrants, and is a reminder that however subjective and fickle “criminal” status is, the consequences of criminalization with this kind of surveillance are swift and dangerous for many members of our communities.

The backlash from this exposee, among other pressures, pushed Flock to claim that they're “pausing” ICE's ability to search their network. There's no clear way for Flock to prove this to the public, and cooperating police departments are continuing to grant ICE access illegally^{17,SFPDsource}.

What can I do about it?

Organize

Flock's strategy is currently working so well for them because people are kept in the dark about what is going on. Many communities across the country have fought Flock and won simply by raising awareness and starting a public conversation. Austin TX, Denver CO, and Oak Park IL, Sedona AZ, have all cancelled their contracts with Flock after communities campaigned for that change¹⁸. With a little bit of work, you could achieve the same in your city or county. Financial commentators think community organizing against Flock is a threat to their profit- we hope so too!

Print this Zine out, have some conversations with your neighbors, and talk to your local elected officials about your values around privacy and surveillance.

Research

We encourage folks to continue researching this issue: we've been diligent in our research, but everyone should do their own. Check out the ACLU's article: "How to Pump the Brakes on Your Police Department's Use of Flock's Mass Surveillance License Plate Readers" to learn more¹⁹!

The Deflock Project: deflock.me

This site has lots of further reading for the curious. They host a valuable community resource; an ALPR map showing many documented ALPRs across the US and elsewhere in the world. Check this map to see if there are any Flock cameras or other ALPRs in your area —though keep in mind that it is not always up to date on newer cameras— the deflock map is created by people like you who see ALPRs on roadways and map them.

The Rural Privacy Coalition (ruralprivacy.org)

This site is run by and for rural people across the country who are organizing against technologies like Flock and the systems that necessitate them. They've got FOIA request templates, info session flyer templates, this zine, guides on how to hold community info sessions, and more! Don't be shy, small town organizing tools can suit city folks just fine too.

Safety isn't found in surveillance. Meet your neighbors, watch their cats while they're away, and ask for that cup of sugar. We can keep each other safe!

*they have computers to cast the I Ching for them
but we have yarrow stalks
and the stars*

Diane di Prima, revolutionary letter #45



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If we don't do anything, if we go along with the status quo, we are going to have a mass surveillance world.

-Edward Snowden

