

***Camera Phones:***  
**The New Wrinkle in the Fight against Crime!**

**By Susan Bartelstone**

Cell phones have become an amazingly important weapon in the fight against crime and camera phones are a new wrinkle in this ongoing battle. They're responsible for apprehending a whole mess of criminals and saving many potential victims. Several recent incidents come to mind.

A 15-year-old New Jersey boy used quick thinking to foil an abduction attempt when he snapped pictures with his camera cell phone of a man who was attempting to lure him into a car. He also photographed the car's license plate. Police were able to arrest the suspected abductor the very next day and praised the youngster for his presence of mind. In Tennessee, an equally sharp limo driver used his camera phone to photograph a man who'd robbed him earlier that week—after he spotted his assailant's pickup truck on the street. Police picked up the culprit within ten minutes.

In Queens, NY, a scared but determined high school girl kept her cool and took a camera phone picture of a serial flasher who'd exposed himself to her on a crowded F train platform at 7:30AM. She ran to a policeman with the phone and the pervert was caught on the spot.

About four months after this incident, another New York City subway rider was confronted by a flasher who exposed himself while sitting directly across from her in the subway car. Not only did she photograph him (which led to his arrest), but she posted his image on the Internet, ensuring the pervert will get exposure for years to come rather than the three-to-six month sentence (if that!) typically imposed for this most trivialized of crimes. Other examples of "camera phone justice" and techno-policing are sure to occur in the future, since more and more people are embracing this new technology.

**One caveat:** someone e-mailed me a story about a woman in her neighborhood who was raped as she stood on a street corner talking on her cell phone. She'd become so absorbed in the call, she forgot to pay attention to what was going on around her.

It's perfectly understandable that people will get or make calls on their cell phones when they're out at night, but use common sense. Criminals overwhelmingly prefer to target someone who is preoccupied, so don't let your cell phone become a distraction—**NO MATTER THE TIME OR PLACE**—and prevent you from staying alert. No one deserves to become a crime victim because of a mistake in judgment!

***Safety Tip: Everyone should carry a cell phone (with or without a camera), if only for traffic emergencies. Make sure it's always fully charged and preset to dial 911. In general, if you have the occasion to use your camera phone to photograph a criminal in action, try to do it unobtrusively, so he/she doesn't come after you and attempt to destroy the evidence (and hurt you in the process).***