

## Privacy at Work

Employees have no right of privacy at work, and so virtually everything that goes on in the workplace can be and is monitored. Computer use is monitored. More than half of employers monitor how much time their employees spend on the phone.

Employers have legitimate concerns about the private lives of employees because what employees do and how they act may cause problems at work. For example:

Concern about an employee's drinking or drug taking.

Concern about romance between a boss and one of his employees.

The need for an employer to be able to quickly find an employee in an emergency situation.

Concern about a supervisor's' bad language if it is offensive to a female employee.

Some have raised questions about the employers' use of tracking devices, such as global positioning systems (GPS), smart cards, location-based services such as cell phones or handheld computers, and radio-frequency identifications (RFID). These have resulted in claims of invasion of privacy by employees against employers. All of the tools available for spying are available to employers. Virtually everything an employee does at work on a computer can be monitored, and for every employer who lets his staff know they're on watch, there are plenty who snoop on the sly.

How does this surveillance fit into whatever the company views as its "culture?" If a company is all about freedom of information, extensive surveillance could well be counterproductive; it may be that if "the boss" feels he must monitor employees all day long, he has the wrong people working for him. He may well want to be certain that those who monitor are not overzealous; monitor only where there are grounds to suspect there has been abuse; and that whatever policy is written and is applied fairly.

It is also appropriate for the boss to remind her employees from time to time that they are being monitored. As with other things involving ethics, fairness should always be considered.