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Crave privacy? New tech knocks out digital cameras

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By [Michael Kanellos](#)
Staff Writer, CNET News.com

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Researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology have come up with an inexpensive way to prevent digital cameras and digital video cameras from capturing that secret shot.

The technology they've devised detects the presence of a digital camera up to 33 feet away and can then shoot a targeted beam of light at the lens, according to [Shwetak Patel](#), a grad student at the university and one of the lead researchers on the project.

That means that someone trying for a surreptitious snapshot of, say, a product prototype or an amorous couple gets something altogether less useful--a blurry picture (or a video) of what looks like a flashlight beam, seen head on. (A video of how the system works can be viewed [here](#).)



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The group has developed a lab prototype--which consists of a digital projector with a modified video camera mounted on top--but will soon design a device that could be manufactured and sold commercially. The group, which presented a paper on its work at [UbiComp](#) (The Seventh International Conference on Ubiquitous Computing) in Tokyo last week, is also in contact with large consumer electronics manufacturers.

Though photo-foiling gadgets are one possibility, the technology might also eventually be incorporated into digital projectors and other devices as a feature.

The Georgia Tech researchers aren't alone in their pursuit. Tech giant Hewlett-Packard, for one, has applied for a patent on technology that could [remotely cause blurry pictures](#) in digital cameras, but it requires putting additional circuitry inside the camera. HP and others are also working on projection technology meant to [stymie video piracy](#).

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The technology is a stab at ameliorating the **privacy** problems that have arisen with the advent, quick ubiquity and tiny dimensions of digital cameras. Nearly 85 percent of **cell phones** in Japan come with built-in digital cameras, and the figure for North America and Western Europe is supposed to rise to 80 percent by the end of next year, according to market researcher Gartner.

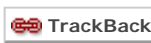
"It certainly is a concern, and it has been a concern since cameras have gotten really small," said Steve Baker, an analyst at NPD Group. "It is a lab trick that has some real-world application."

Companies commonly confiscate digital cameras temporarily from visitors coming to their labs or confidential meetings. "But you can't confiscate a phone. Someone might be expecting an important call," Patel said.

Many companies also maintain strict no-photography policies in quasi public places. Someone trying to take pictures inside a Wal-Mart or an **electronics boutique** will immediately draw a warning, or expulsion. Conferences also have similar rules. Patel himself got in trouble trying to take a picture of a "No Photography" sign to illustrate where the

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