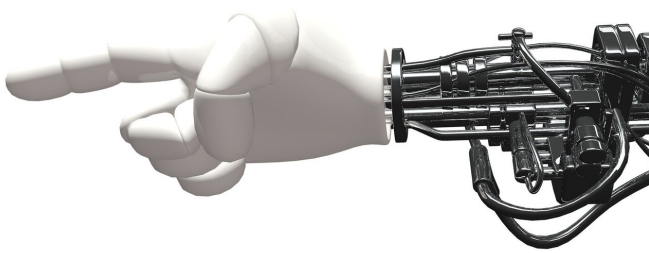


Singapore is testing robots to patrol the streets for 'undesirable' behavior like smoking

8 September 2021, by Emily Adams



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Singapore is in the midst of a three-week trial for a pair of autonomous robots that patrol the public for "undesirable social behaviors" that include smoking in prohibited areas and violating COVID-19 gathering regulations.

The pair of robots, known as Xavier, are equipped with cameras that can provide 360-degree footage and sensors that allow them to navigate in public and analyze potential public safety violations.

According to a press release from the Home Team Science and Technology Agency, if Xavier detects an undesirable behavior, it will alert a public officer control center and officers can respond in person or remotely via the [robot's](#) interactive dashboard. Five Singaporean government agencies are involved in the testing of Xavier.

"The deployment of ground robots will help to augment our surveillance and enforcement resources," said Lilly Ling, the Singapore Food Agency's East Regional Office Director, in a press release. "The adoption of robotics technology can

be used to enhance such operations, and reduce the need for our officers to do physical patrols."

HTX said in its [press release](#) that the robots will be specifically looking for five behaviors during the three-week trial run in Toa Payoh Central, a high-traffic residential district. They are:

- Smoking in prohibited areas
- Illegal hawking
- Improperly parked bicycles
- Groups of more than five people in violation of COVID-19 safety regulations
- Motorcycles and other motorized transportation devices on walking paths

This is Singapore's second attempt at enforcing social policies like COVID-19 restrictions using robotic monitoring. In May 2020, the government launched robot dogs, created by the Massachusetts-based company Boston Dynamics, to patrol public parks and maintain social distancing. The robo-dogs were equipped with cameras and speakers that would "bark" reminders at park goers who were closer than one meter apart.

Robotic police alternatives have also been introduced in some U.S. cities. The New York Police Department briefly had a contract with Boston Dynamics to use the robo-dogs in the Big Apple, but the program was canceled after widespread public backlash. The Honolulu Police Department recently began utilizing the dogs to patrol a tent city, and Huntington Park, California also utilizes a robot to monitor public parks.

"There's the potential for these robots to increase the militarization of police departments and use it in ways that are unacceptable," said Jongwook Kim, legal director at the American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii.

Tony Teo, the Group Director for Environmental Public Health Operations at the Singapore National Environmental Agency, said in the release that he views the Xavier robots as a public service tool.

"The trial of robot Xavier marks an important development in our continued journey to tap on technology to transform the way we operate and enhance service delivery," Teo said. "We look forward to exploring how the robotic platform capabilities can augment our ground operations for public health offenses."

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