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Talking CCTV cameras accuse wrong person

Martin Wainwright
Thursday April 12, 2007
[The Guardian](#)

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Britain's talking CCTV cameras are to issue their first apology for embarrassing a blameless passerby on the day the government announces plans to extend the anti-vandalism scheme to 20 town centres.

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Marie Brewster, 26, a young mother, appeared on TV news reports after a camera operator mistakenly thought she had dropped litter and boomed out a reprimand from the control centre in Middlesbrough.

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Ms Brewster said yesterday: "We were in the town centre and I'd got some chips at McDonald's for my daughter Ellie, but they were hot so I tipped them into a box and crumpled the packet up."

"I put it on the bottom of Ellie's pram to take home but then heard this voice say: 'Please place the rubbish in the bin provided'."

She said she had no idea the incident had appeared on TV

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until her mother-in-law phoned.

"I still think the cameras are a good idea, but I have to say when you haven't done anything wrong it's annoying to appear like this."

Middlesbrough council, which has had inquiries from across Europe and the US about the "bossy cameras", said the incident would be investigated. Four council staff operate nine talking cameras out of 150 which keep an eye on the town. There are an estimated 4.2m CCTV cameras in Britain.

Barry Coppinger, Middlesbrough's executive member for community safety, said: "I'm sorry if there has been a misunderstanding and I'll be writing to Ms Brewster to apologise."

The council's system has so impressed the Home Office that last week, the home secretary, John Reid, said it would be extended to Derby, Norwich, Southwark in London and other towns, at a cost of £500,000.

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