

Police buildup in Pittsburgh in lead-up to marathon

Our reporter
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The City of Pittsburgh is using the occasion of the marathon race this Sunday for a massive police presence and buildup not seen in the city since the 2010 G20 meeting.

While the Obama administration and FBI officials are officially saying that the Boston bombings were not part of any terrorist conspiracy, city, state and federal officials are using the Pittsburgh Marathon as a rehearsal for a large-scale police mobilization and to accustom workers and young people to a greater police presence.

More than 550 Pittsburgh police officers will be on duty for the race, with all day-off passes cancelled. In addition, hundreds of police from surrounding communities are being brought in, as well as agents from the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. City officials have indicated that they may also request the presence of the National Guard, but have not done so yet.

The Pittsburgh Marathon draws 26,000 runners and about 100,000 spectators. In addition, thousands of people volunteer, staffing hydration and first-aid stations along the route.

Police will be concentrated throughout the downtown area near the start and finish lines. In addition, police will be stationed throughout the route of the race.

A six-foot-high perimeter fence is being erected around the start and finish lines cordoning off all spectators from viewing the start and finish of the race. Only registered runners will be permitted inside the perimeter after having to go through airport-style security screening, and then they will be moved to corrals within the perimeter of the fencing. Runners will be given clear plastic bags to hold any personal items, such as change of clothes or food, that they want to recover after the race.

Bomb-sniffing dogs have already walked the length of the race and will do so again on Saturday and Sunday. Helicopters will be flying overhead, and Coast Guard boats will be moving up and down the rivers and watching the various bridges the runners cross.

City workers and vendors are scrambling to install dozens of additional cameras in the city, which already has a sizable network of surveillance cameras. They will be placed along the route and by the start and finish areas. License Plate Recognition cameras and software will be recording all cars coming and going along the major routes in and out of the city. These cameras have the ability to compare the plate numbers against lists of known suspects in only a few minutes.

Contrary to city law that allows the use of cameras only for investigating crimes—that is, to view footage only after a crime has been committed and not to just watch the goings and comings of the public—police, state and federal officials will be using the cameras throughout the race to carry out surveillance of the crowds.

In various press conferences, city and police officials have stressed that they will be both a seen and unseen presence, but have not answered questions on what this means. They are likely working with federal officials to monitor various individuals and groups. E-mails, text messages, tweets, and Facebook postings are also more than likely being scanned for information.



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