

Digital Evidence from Body-Worn Cameras in Seven Sites

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The full report and executive summary entitled,
Managing Digital Evidence From Body Worn
Cameras: Case Studies in Seven Sites, is available
at www.srtbwc.com/resources.

Highlights

Over the last eight years, body-worn cameras (BWC) have proliferated across the United States. These cameras have resulted in an increase in the number of videos, amount of storage space needed, and requests for that footage by the public. Little is known, however, about the use of video footage and the challenges that come with it.

To provide information to law enforcement agencies and prosecutor offices, we examined the process for managing BWC footage in seven agencies: Los Angeles, Phoenix, Glendale, AZ, Rochester, NY, Harris County, TX, the Broward County State Attorney's Office, and Fort Lauderdale Police Department.

Taking a case study approach, we conducted interviews and analyzed BWC data and explored the commonalities and differences of using BWC footage across the seven agencies. The full report and executive summary can be obtained [here](#).

Findings

Three major findings stand out from our study:

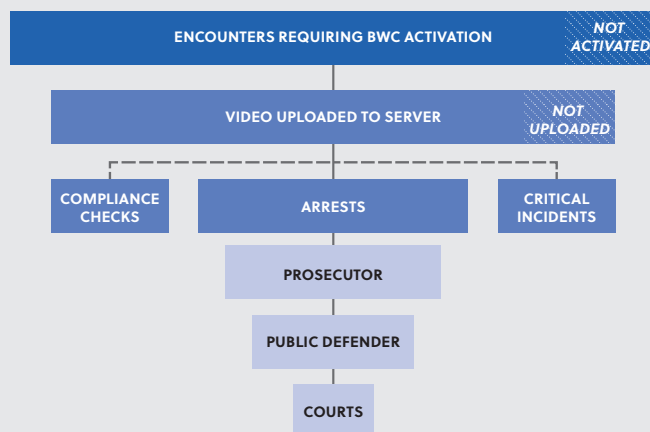
First, we found that the use of body-worn camera footage (and other digital evidence) is interconnected throughout the entire criminal justice system. That is, footage is a unique piece of evidence that is used for internal purposes within a policing agency and for specific evidentiary purposes for prosecutors, public defenders, and the courts.

Second, BWCs and their footage require more resources than criminal justice agencies initially realized. Police and sheriff offices must keep up with maintenance, upgrades of cameras, software needs, and the fast-paced evolution of technology to manage BWCs. In the rest of the criminal justice system, agencies are not equipped (literally and figuratively) to manage the digital evidence onslaught.

Third, while the release of video footage to the public is an important component of transparency and accountability, many agencies have different rules, policies, and state laws that govern that release.

Digital Evidence Management (DEM)

encompasses a wide variety of devices, technologies, tools, and data, particularly as they relate to the criminal justice. Video footage from body-worn cameras is a form of digital evidence.



BWC Footage Flow Chart

In most cases, law enforcement agencies follow the BWC flow chart -- from activating the camera, to compliance reviews or audits, to arrests, to providing prosecutors the footage via the cloud or DVDs/CDs. Within an agency, footage is likely to be reviewed after critical incidents -- uses of force, officer-involved shootings, and most recently, the activities of officers and people during protests and demonstrations.

Specific Findings From the Sites

Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD)

Over 7,000 cameras are used in the LAPD. The Department uses footage in its reviews of critical events, to assist in investigations of crimes, for training, and to provide the public with information. LAPD policy requires that video footage for critical events be released to the public within 45 days of the event.

South Florida Collaboration: Fort Lauderdale Police Department (FLPD) and Broward County State Attorney (BSAO)

FLPD assigns two cameras to each officer, thus the department has about 1,100 cameras for its 535 officers. A BWC administrator and assistants are responsible for managing BWC footage. The BCSAO has a Digital Evidence Unit devoted to managing BWC footage and other evidence from 16 law enforcement agencies. A regional (and now state-wide) collaboration has assisted in troubleshooting and solving problems associated with BWC footage.

Rochester Police Department (RPD)

In 2015, RPD began implementing BWCs. With about 725 sworn officers, RPD has deployed about 500 cameras to its patrol officers and special units. RPD uses footage for investigations and the prosecutor's office has adopted a new system for managing the proliferation of digital evidence.

Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO)

HCSO has 2,254 deputies, deployed over 1,500 BWCs to its patrol deputies, and in 2020 uploaded over 1.1 million videos and shared nearly 44,000 videos with its district attorney. To ensure compliance with its policies, sergeants review approximately 10-12% of BWC video each week. The department relies on compliance checks to inform training and increase positive outcomes for deputies with first time infractions.

Phoenix Police Department (PPD)

To manage and use digital evidence, PPD established a special BWC unit staffed with 16 employees. The majority of BWC digital evidence storage space (85.5%) is dedicated to incidents involving order maintenance, violent crime, traffic-related incidents, property crime, and service activities. PPD provided digital evidence for nearly 16,000 cases to county and city prosecutors in 2020.

Glendale Police Department (GPD)

Three hundred GPD officers wear cameras. Officers recorded more than 187,000 videos per year. The department stresses continuous activation of the camera, comprehensive auditing, and use of force reviews. Monthly audits by supervisors, comparisons of videos to each officer's calls, and inspections to ensure that videos are appropriately tagged have resulted in an activation compliance rate of over 95%.



Recommendations

Based on the case studies of the seven jurisdictions, here are key recommendations:

1. As part of a law enforcement agency's BWC program, establishing a BWC policy is important. The policy should include details for deploying, activating, reviewing, and releasing footage from BWCs.
2. Law enforcement and criminal justice agencies should plan for the expansion of digital evidence.
3. When using body-worn cameras, law enforcement agencies should ensure that officers and deputies accurately tag and categorize the incidents that are recorded on their cameras.
4. The importance of BWC footage to the public cannot be overstated. Policing agencies should dedicate appropriate resources to respond to public requests for BWC footage.
5. Research should examine the use of digital evidence in small, rural, and tribal agencies and the criminal justice systems involved with those agencies.
6. Metadata (information within BWC platforms) are an untapped resource that could be used to assist agencies, researchers, and policy makers. More research is needed to show how the data could be used in day-to-day operations and training
7. Researchers and police should determine how to standardize the data from BWC footage. That is, in order to make appropriate comparisons between and among agencies -- i.e., the numbers of videos, storage space, and other basic information -- standards should be set for those comparisons.

Metadata refers to the compilation of information on BWC platforms. They include the types of calls that police respond to, GPS-based locations, length of time at the scene (and on video), officers who were involved, whether an arrest was made, and other information pertinent to police activity.

SITE	OFFICERS W/ BWCS	BWC VIDEOS IN 2019	STORAGE USED
BROWARD COUNTY STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE	N/A	165,000	87.4 TERABYTES
FORT LAUDERDALE POICE DEPTARTMENT	535	271,000	5 TERABYTES
GLENDALE POLICE DEPT.	300	20,000	130 TERABYTES
HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE	1,590	342,000	1.1 PETABYTES
LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT	7,000	4,000,000	1.3 PETABYTES
PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT	2,170	800,000	300 TERABYTES
ROCHESTER POLICE DEPARTMENT	502	300,000	400 TERABYTES

Exhibit 1. DEM Participants and BWC Information, 2019



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