



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA CITIZENS POLICE OVERSIGHT COMMISSION

POLICY TRANSLATION FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

Title: PPD's Body Worn Camera Policy	Type of Report: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Final <input type="checkbox"/> Supplemental
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What are Body Worn Cameras (BWCs)?

Body Worn Cameras (BWCs) are systems that capture audio and/or video signals and are individually worn by police officers. These devices provide audio and video recording of events that officers encounter. Body Worn Cameras are useful to both law enforcement and the public for preserving factual representations of officer-citizen interactions. The Philadelphia Police Department currently uses Axon cameras, which were chosen after conducting a pilot program with over ten different cameras.

How do Body Worn Cameras work?



When an officer begins their tour of duty, the officer must push the on/off switch at the top of the camera; the camera then emits a green light. The camera is now in “standby mode.” At this point, the camera is on and technically recording but does not retain any of the footage unless an officer

double-taps the center circular portion of the camera called the EVENT Button. After the double tap, the light at the top of the camera turns red to indicate the camera is actively recording. The saved video clip will include 60 seconds of footage prior to the officer double-tapping, but these 60 seconds do not include audio. This 60-second period is called the “buffering period.” Sometimes in sudden or dangerous situations an officer may take actions in the moment and then double-tap the EVENT button, which can result in the entirety of an incident still being captured on video (but missing some audio) because of the 60 second buffering period. To stop recording, the officer must hold down on the EVENT Button for 2-3 seconds to return the camera to standby mode. The officer uses the on/off switch to turn the camera off at the end of their shift.

What are the rules and regulations around the use of Body Worn Cameras?

There are approximately 3400 cameras currently assigned to officers. BWCs are assigned to individual officers, so if an officer changes districts, the camera goes with them. 18 out of 21 patrol districts have cameras. The 7th and 8th districts are next up to receive cameras and training. The 15th district will be the only one without cameras. There are special units such as the Narcotics and Highway Patrol Units that will eventually be receiving cameras as well, and the Marine Unit. Detectives also utilize BWCs to record video statements. All uniformed officers will be equipped with a BWC.

According to the Philadelphia Police Department’s Body Worn Camera policy (PPD Directive 4.21), BWCs should be activated prior to responding to all calls for service and during all law enforcement encounters & activities involving the general public, including:

- Responding to crimes in progress
- Initiating any vehicular or foot pursuit
- Conducting any vehicle or pedestrian investigation
- Initiating a sight arrest or citation
- Taking a statement or information from a victim or witness
- Handling a disturbance or crisis related incident
- Handling any protest or demonstration
- Conducting a suspect confrontation
- When confronted by any member of the general public that may become “confrontational or hostile”

Officers should deactivate a Body Worn Camera prior to the conclusion of an incident or event under the following circumstances:

- When recording would capture “gruesome images” or when private areas of the human body are exposed and there is no legitimate law enforcement need to capture the images
- When entering a religious institution during services
- When entering a hospital room or patient private area in a hospital

Prior to turning off the camera, officers should state the specific reason why it is being turned off.

Areas where recording is prohibited:

- Non-work related personal activities or conversation
- Places where a reasonable expectation of privacy exists (ie. locker rooms, dressing rooms/restrooms)
- Conversations with confidential informants & undercover officers
- During any strip searches
- When discussing operational strategies or tactics
- Recording media captured on a BWC to another recording device (ie. Cell phone)

How is Body Worn Camera footage stored and saved?

On average, officers end up with a total of 1.5 hours of video of interactions or encounters per shift on their BWCs. At the end of each tour, officers using BWCs place their assigned BWC in its camera docking station. The data is then transferred from the BWC through the docking station to a secured cloud.

Unless a specific incident or event is bookmarked as an arrest, a crime scene / part of a criminal investigation, or pending review, digital recordings captured by BWCs will be deleted seventy-five (75) days from the date of the incident or event. Once footage is tagged under these categories, it becomes a long-term video that will not be deleted. It can become associated with a DC #, its location, disposition, and category.

The following types of footage are mandatory for officers to tag:

- Beginning of any response to a priority one (1) assignment
- Beginning of any vehicular or foot pursuit
- Beginning of any vehicle or pedestrian investigation
- Beginning of any sight arrest or citation
- Beginning of any disturbance or crisis related incident
- Beginning of an officer's involvement at any protest or demonstration
- Beginning of any incident where an officer is confronted by any member of the general public that, in the officer's opinion, became confrontational, antagonistic or hostile
- Beginning when taking a statement or information from a victim or witness

Officers can tag footage in real time by pressing the function button on their cameras, which creates a black line on the footage to break it up as different types of activity. Officers can also tag the footage via a desktop app. Eventually, the BWC program will issue cell phones to officers so that they can tag footage and footage can be accessed in real time by other officers or investigators.

CPOC is reviewing PPD's compliance with their Body Worn Camera policies

The Citizens Police Oversight Commission is working on an annual audit of PPD's compliance with their policy on Body Worn Cameras: PPD Directive 4.21. This audit will evaluate metrics such as whether officers are turning on their BWCs when required, keeping cameras on for the duration of an incident, stating why they are turning the camera off, and properly tagging footage. This audit will also review public records requests for BWC footage.

Body Worn Cameras are a powerful tool in police oversight: they have the ability to provide more clear-cut evidence of police encounters with the public and they play a pivotal role in police misconduct evaluations. "He said she said" cases can become adjudicated based on the presence of Body Worn Camera footage capturing an incident. Thus, as police officers in Philadelphia increasingly utilize Body Worn Cameras, it is important to monitor and evaluate how officers are using the technology and whether they are using it according to policy. This audit is pivotal to the CPOC's goal of increasing transparency and accountability of Police Department functions.

The Body Worn Camera audit is a result of the success of Philadelphia City Council's CPOC legislation and the growth of our office. Due to this legislation, the Police Advisory Commission (PAC) has transitioned into the independent police oversight agency of CPOC with more resources, staff, and oversight authority. In the lead-up to the transition the PAC was able to hire a group of auditors and monitors whose primary responsibilities include conducting oversight of policies, practices, and conduct of the Philadelphia Police Department and its officers. As the Citizens Police Oversight Commission, we are now able to diversify our projects and take a deeper dive into this subject in a way that would not have been possible before.