

Daytona Beach (FL): Body-Worn Cameras

Voiceover

00:00

This is *The Beat*—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

Debra McCullough

00:08

With us today is Chief Mike Chitwood from Daytona Beach Police Department in Daytona Beach, Florida. He is here to discuss his department's use of body-worn cameras, including the challenges to implementing a body-camera program and the benefits that body cameras can have for both police officers and the greater community. Chief Chitwood, welcome.

Chief Mike Chitwood

00:32

Good morning.

McCullough

00:33

Good morning. What effect has the use of body-worn cameras had on the number of complaints received since the cameras were implemented?

Chitwood

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Preliminarily, cause we've only been up and running for six months, we have seen a decrease. The decrease that we are seeing is when people who come in to make a complaint against the officer discover that the officer is wearing a body camera or was wearing a body camera at the time, they elect not to file a complaint at that time. That's what we're seeing right now. Statistically, we haven't been up and running long enough to get to that point yet, but we're hoping that we're going to see the same reduction in complaints against the police as other police departments who have been using this technology a little bit longer than us have been seeing.

McCullough

01:18

How has recording an officer's activities affected the way an officer administers force when dealing with citizens?

Chitwood

01:27

I can use one anecdotal story. I have an officer who is a very aggressive officer. He is a good officer. In 2012, he had used force, whether it was his Taser or his ASP or physical hold controls, 12 times in a 12-month period in 2012. Since being outfitted with the camera, he has used force twice. It makes you wonder why has that drop occurred. The officers are good officers and aggressive officers, but it makes you wonder if maybe officers now think twice about using the type of force that they were using.

Which is good and bad, in a way. We don't want our officers to be afraid to use the appropriate amount of force when they're confronted with a situation. What we don't want to see is the excessive force that's used. That's the catch we try to preach to the officers. What our experience has been is that officers, when they use force, they want to see that video. They want their supervisors to see, they want the public to see, "Hey, this is what I was confronted with and this is the amount of force that I had to use."

The technology that we have with the Axon cameras that are mounted either on glasses or on the officer's shoulder, you get a panoramic view for what has happened. We've taken it a step further and my SWAT team now also has body cameras on them. They use a different brand. They use a Contour camera. Where the officers who are the breachers, the officers who are the first through the door, and the perimeter officers—you're getting an entire view when a search warrant is served. The SWAT team is able to go back and review it after every raid, where they look for things they may have done incorrectly or to improve themselves through training. The uses for these cameras—it's amazing what we can do, from a training perspective, from complaints against the police perspective, from protecting the public, from documenting evidence.

McCullough

03:33

Speaking of documentation, has your department used body-worn cameras to help document evidence to prosecute perpetrators and can you provide us with a few examples?

Chitwood

03:45

Absolutely. And that's what the beauty of these cameras are. The cameras are not only there for complaints against the police. They can be used to document, in the field, incidents that occur. One of the problems I think we all face in law enforcement in particular is domestic violence. We get there, we make the arrest, we do everything that we can do to document it, and then the victim for a multitude of reasons will decide, you know what, maybe I don't want to prosecute now.

We have one case in particular that occurred last March where the officers respond to a woman screaming for help. When the officers get there, they peer into the window, and the officer has his body camera right on his glasses—the camera is right where his head is. You see the defendant is on top of

the woman, choking her. She is basically passing out. He's screaming, "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you. Today's your day to die." Then the officers kick the door in and then they go and make the arrest. As a matter of fact, Taser has that video posted on their website.

That case goes to court and the woman's like, "Look, you know, I broke up with him. I'm not going to go forward with the court case." But the state attorney's office says, "You know what, this is great video evidence. This is not the first time this guy's been abusive toward a woman. We're going to go forward with the video."

That's something that would never have happened in my 26 years as a law enforcement officer, but now we're seeing these types of things that are documented. Whether it be a search warrant, whether it be consent when you're out on the street and you talk to a person, "Hey, we'd like to get consent to search your car." "Sure officer, go ahead, I've got nothing to hide." And then the officer goes in and finds two pounds of weed in the car or two pounds of cocaine. Then when it goes to court, the guy's like, "Well, I never gave consent." Well, here it is, right on video. Your consent was, we gave you the warnings, you didn't have to consent to us, you have the right to have us request a search warrant, and then, "nope, nope, nope, there's nothing in there. Feel free to search." Here's what we discovered. It's kind of hard to refute that.

McCullough

05:34

How were you able to garner support for the use of body-worn cameras vs. vehicle mounted cameras? What's the difference?

Chitwood

05:43

The vehicle mounted cameras do not go everywhere the officer goes. That's one of the limitations. Of course, we have in-car cameras. At the time, they were cutting-edge technology and that's where we wanted to go. When the body-worn cameras came into play, it was a no-brainer. It's the new technology. We in law enforcement always are after the newest, best, and latest technology. It helps us do our jobs. It's a force multiplier.

When we started in Daytona Beach, because of the number of lawsuits, because of the use-of-force complaints, we targeted our "problem children." Officers that needed a little more guidance, a little more structure, a little more training. Then we called for volunteers. Within six months of the program, more officers were saying, "Hey, the next time we get cameras in, I want one of them. I had an incident where I went to court and, boy, if I'd had that kind of documentation, it would have been a slam-dunk of a court case."

We have morphed away from the dashboard cameras. More and more officers are requesting—and it's just a matter of funding—to have these body-worn cameras. From my experience, it's a win-win. From the next batch of cameras, I myself as the police chief will be wearing a camera. Because every Friday,

the command staff goes out on the street as we are during special events because it's a special event city, and if my officers are going to wear it, all the commanders are going to wear one too. We're going to lead by example. You can't go wrong.

Our policy, we want you to turn the camera on when you get out of the car. Clearly, if someone's coming up and giving you information, you're not going to record that person. There's no reason to record that person. But when you're going to step out of that car, to have a citizens' encounter, or a radio call, or a traffic stop, well then we want you to activate it. You have to use a little bit of common sense, depending on what you're trying to do.

I think our policy for the most part, while it's in flux because this is all emerging technology, I think our policy kind of outlines that pretty clearly. Just turn the thing on—you'll be glad you turned it on later on down the line. We can deal with transgressions from an officer from a training standpoint. Again, if it captures wrongdoing, well then so be it. That's the fate of the officer. The officer doesn't belong working for us anyway.

The overwhelming—I just believe in 2013, this is what modern policing is all about. If you don't get on board with this wave, you're doing a disservice to your department and your city.

McCullough

08:15

Chief Chitwood, thank you so much for your time and your expertise on the subject. Thank you.

Chitwood

08:19

Thank you very much. Have a good day.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

08:22

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

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