Body-Worn Cameras

Johnston Police Chief Bill Vaughn began researching the use and effectiveness of body-worn cameras back in 2013. What he discovered is departments that have the recording devices see an improvement in citizen behavior, department transparency and complaints filed. The Johnston Police Department began using the cameras in early 2015. Right now two officers per shift wear a camera on their uniform.

How Do They Work?

At the beginning of each shift, an officer picks up his/her camera from a docking station. They press a button, wait a few seconds, and the camera is ready to operate. The officer simply needs to press record when they encounter a member of the public on a call. Every interaction with the public will be recorded (except during educational outreach).

Once an interaction is complete, the officer stops recording. At the end of each shift, the recorder is placed back on the docking station so that the video may be uploaded and preserved as evidence. The Johnston Police Department plans to save each recording for 60-90 days.

The Johnston Police Department chose the TASER Axon brand, which offers a 140 degree view during recordings.

Are The Cameras Effective?

The Johnston Police Department has chosen to wear the cameras because they act as an unbiased witness to events. The department also believes they promote transparency. Rialto, California police reported a 60 percent reduction in use-of-force incidents after a pilot program in 2012. There also was an 88 percent reduction in citizen complaints when compared with the year prior to deployment.

Johnston's program is in the very early stages and it is one the department will monitor for effectiveness as the weeks and months progress.

Frequently Asked Questions

Shouldn't they ask my permission before recording me?

Iowa is a one-person-consent state. That means that, legally, your permission is not needed to record you.

May I view a video after I've been recorded?

Yes. Go to the Police Department reception desk and make a request to view the video. Your request will be treated like any other public information request and you will be abllowed to view the recording. In some casess, it may be 7-10 business days before you are able to see the recording, depending upon the current workload of officers and staff. The Johnston Police Department is located at 6373 Merle Hay Road.

When will an officer decide to start recording?

According to department policy, Officers shall activate their body worn camera on all citizen contacts, regardless of type of contact. This section may not apply to:

1. Contacts with other law enforcement persons;
2. Contacts with friends/family of a personal nature;
3. Cordial contacts which are very brief;
4. Community relations functions/presentations;
5. Adopt-A-School site visits

Where can I see the department's full policy on body-worn cameras?

It is posted at www.cityofjohnston.com/police

How are officers being trained to use these?

Officers who are assigned a camera shall be trained and proficient in their use of the body worn camera equipment. If further training is needed to achieve proficiency in the body worn camera recording system, the officer shall contact a supervisor to receive training to achieve proficiency. This training shall be documented by a task list and signed off as soon as training is complete. The Field Training Coordinator will create a task list for this purpose.

All officers who are assigned a camera will be trained on the operation of the Body Worn Camera System, and are expected to become knowledgeable about the operation and functions of the system as outlined in the user manual. A printed copy of the instructions is available. Problems encountered while using the Body Worn Camera System shall be brought to a supervisor's attention as soon as possible and an equipment repair order shall be turned in.