

Fresno police start body camera program to build 'trust'

By Carmen George

Fresno Police Sgt. Robert Dewey describes locations a uniformed officer can wear a body camera. [Related story](#)
THE FRESNO BEE

Fifty Fresno police officers were equipped with body cameras Tuesday, with the department rolling out more cameras in the months ahead, Chief Jerry Dyer said.

Dyer held a news conference Tuesday afternoon announcing the new body camera program where officers' uniforms will be equipped with video. He also said an anonymous donor recently gave \$500,000 toward the program.

Dyer said his goal is to equip all uniformed officers in the field — about 400 people — with body cameras.

Why body cameras? "It really boils down to this — trust," Dyer said.

There has been an "erosion" of trust in law enforcement over the past few years, Dyer said, spurred largely by some high-profile deaths involving officers — including teenager Michael Brown, shot in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner, choked in New York City.

While Fresno hasn't experienced large-scale police protests, Dyer said, "that's not to say we can't improve upon what we do to maintain and gain that trust, and this (body cameras) is one step towards it."

Dyer said the department started looking into purchasing body cameras three years ago and last summer received more than \$150,000 for cameras and associated equipment through a combination of Fresno general fund dollars and a state grant.

Of 100 new cameras, 50 were put on officers Tuesday and another 50 officers will receive them in February, Dyer said.

A donor who asked to remain anonymous gave \$500,000 that will also result in 50 new cameras purchased every month over the next six-plus months, Dyer said.

The Fresno Regional Foundation presented the check to Dyer on Tuesday, acting as representative of the donor, who gave the \$500,000 to the Fresno Police Chiefs Foundation.

Of the donation, Dyer said, "I can't even understand how somebody would do that, but I thank God that this person has stepped forward ..."

Mike Shirinian, president of the Fresno Police Chiefs Foundation and owner of the Elbow Room Bar & Grill, used the moment to urge other Fresno business owners to "step up" and make donations that "ensure the safety of our community."

Since police received funding for the 100 cameras last summer, Dyer said, the department did an "enormous amount of research" to draft a policy and procedure manual for the cameras' use, which was recently completed. Among those consulted was the Fresno County District Attorney's Office.

District Attorney Lisa A. Smittcamp said "the DA's office is ready to accept this new-found evidence" and paraphrased what Dyer said earlier, that body cameras are not only a "wave of the future" but a reality of the present. Dyer said other law enforcement agencies in the region are now considering body cameras.

The police department started with five body cameras last summer, used by the department's homeless task force with great success, Dyer said.

Head of that task force, Sgt. Robert Dewey, said videos can't be edited by officers. Once plugged into a docking station at the end of a shift, Dewey said, the video is automatically uploaded and erased from the camera. "Once it's there, it's there forever. The officer who shot it can't do anything to it except look at it."

However, Dewey said higher ranking officials can edit a video — doing things like grabbing a short clip for evidence in court, or blacking-out a child's face to ensure confidentiality — but that the video exists somewhere in its entirety. He said only Dyer can request that a video be deleted, but only if it's something like a camera accidentally being turned on in a bathroom.

On average, Dewey said, police can get about 2 1/2 hours of video from the body cameras during a shift. Dyer said body cameras will be turned on during things like traffic stops, serving search warrants, or when dealing with someone who has mental health issues.

In drafting body camera policy, Dyer said police were especially careful with privacy issues. He said the body cameras won't be used, for example, during something like interviewing a child who is a victim of sexual assault.

Dyer said each officer equipped with a camera will also receive a Samsung tablet where they can review video before writing a police report. One hundred tablets have already been purchased.

Dyer said the body cameras were recommended by an independent police auditor, along with a retired judge who audited the department's video policing system.

Said Dyer of the new cameras: "We need to ensure that we are providing the community, the public, with the officer's perspective, the officer's view, of what they are seeing at the time they take action."

Contact Carmen George: cgeorge@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6386 or [@CarmenGeorge](https://twitter.com/CarmenGeorge) on Twitter.

Copyright

© 2015 www.fresnobee.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.fresnobee.com>