

## Police Chief Dyer touts sound tech to pinpoint sources of gunfire

By George  
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Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer on Thursday will ask the City Council to approve a contract that would bring gunshot-spotting technology to parts of Fresno routinely plagued by deadly crime. “Fresno needs this because we have a significant concentration of gangs in our city, and have for many years,” Dyer says. “There is no shortage on our streets of firearms in the hands of the wrong people. Those people have shown a willingness to use firearms frequently.”

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- Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer wants approval to buy gunshot-spotting technology for the city.
- The technology, called ShotSpotter, would be deployed over an area of three square miles.
- For security reasons, Dyer won’t identify the area — but assuredly it’s a high-crime part of the city.

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The day is coming when Fresno police officers responding to gunfire in high-crime neighborhoods will know the shooting’s precise location almost before the “bang” has faded.

Chief Jerry Dyer on Thursday will ask the City Council to approve a contract that would bring gunshot-spotting technology to parts of Fresno routinely plagued by deadly crime.

The system of strategically-placed microphones would give police near-instant geographical information on shootings. The result is expected to be more effective officer responses, faster help for victims and a better chance to nab the shooter.

In other words, a safer Fresno.

“Fresno needs this because we have a significant concentration of gangs in our city, and have for many years,” Dyer says. “There is no shortage on our streets of firearms in the hands of the wrong people. Those people have shown a willingness to use firearms frequently. When they do fire a weapon, we know they don’t fire a round or two. They fire a volley of rounds.

“When that happens, there’s an increased likelihood of innocent people being shot.”

The contract’s details are simple.

Fresno and Bay Area-based SST, Inc. are looking at a three-year deal totaling \$450,000. The money comes from a state grant.

SST’s key product is called [ShotSpotter](#). The brand name says it all.

ShotSpotter will be deployed over an area of three square miles, about 15 to 20 microphones (“acoustic sensors,” Dyer calls them) per square mile.

The company installs and maintains the system.

ShotSpotter’s operational details as described by Dyer are easy to grasp, as well.

Let’s say there’s a shooting at a house in this area. ShotSpotter captures the sound. The information is immediately analyzed by company experts (not located in Fresno). These folks determine whether it’s really gunfire. Dyer doesn’t want his officers chasing after celebratory fireworks.

Let’s say ShotSpotter confirms it’s gunfire. That can happen within 25 seconds. Fresno’s dispatch center is told. So, too, is the police department’s real-time crime center. Most importantly, patrol officers in the area immediately get the tip.

ShotSpotter does much more. It can give the address of the shooting. It can say if the gunfire came from the backyard or the front yard.

For this example, let’s say there were many shots coming from the middle of the street. ShotSpotter can tell police which direction the shooter was traveling while pulling the trigger and how fast he was going.

Dyer says it’s hard to list all the advantages of ShotSpotter.

The police typically depend on people to call about a possible shooting. Sometimes they don’t call out of fear of getting involved. Sometimes they call, but it wasn’t really gunfire. With ShotSpotter, the chief says, officers arrive at a scene firm in the knowledge that they’re dealing with a shooter.

ShotSpotter will be a boon to the reconstruction of events. For example, Dyer says, the system’s ability to identify the location of shooters in a gunfight can help determine whether a suspect’s claim of self-defense has merit.

No need to worry about Big Brother using ShotSpotter to eavesdrop on friends walking down the street. The system doesn’t pick up conversations, Dyer says.

ShotSpotter is to be installed in three urban grids, each one square mile in size. The grids must be contiguous for maximum efficiency, Dyer says. The microphones are attached to poles or buildings, making it difficult to move the

system once it's installed.

Dyer says the three-square-mile area has been picked, but the department is debating whether specifics will be publicly revealed. He says the public's right to know must be balanced by the threat to the microphones from vandals.

Obviously, Fresno's first ShotSpotter area is one with a history of gunfire. Dyer says he's pursuing private funding to apply ShotSpotter to another three square miles. Twelve square miles of ShotSpotter would just about cover the Fresno's hottest shooting grounds, he says.

Finally, there's ShotSpotter's role in the new high-tech world that is the Fresno Police Department.

Video policing (dozens of 24/7 cameras on poles or buildings) is maturing. It won't be long until every sworn officer is wearing a body camera. The real-time crime center will be arming patrol officers in the thick of tense incidents with instantaneous information. "Big Data" — the computerized crunching of mountains of information in a search for patterns — is standard.

And now comes ShotSpotter.

Dyer also has his eye on more ordinary leadership matters. The Great Recession saw his department's roster of sworn officers drop from about 850 to around 700. The total now stands at 710 and should rise to 717 in a few months.

Budget hearings begin in June. The city budget is healing. Dyer is always in a hurry to rebuild.

City Manager Bruce Rudd urges caution. The recovery of police, fire and parks services "will probably be incremental," he says. It looks like the replenishing of reserve accounts and the tackling of long-delayed maintenance projects are first in line.

But Dyer is no slouch at City Hall politics. In the chief's eyes, ShotSpotter can be a spur to something dear to Mayor Ashley Swearingin's heart.

"Unfortunately, we know that the areas where many of the gunshots occur are in those areas the city is trying to revitalize," Dyer says. ShotSpotter "is part of that revitalization effort."

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