

Fresno police unveil state-of-the-art crime tracking system

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A new technology hub for the Fresno Police Department that will control a variety of high-tech gadgets and software was revealed Tuesday by Police Chief Jerry Dyer.

Real Time Crime Center is a privately funded computer system designed to monitor the network of cameras and sensors throughout Fresno. The center will field all 911 calls, and it gives officers access to any city camera — including police body and dash cameras and new traffic cameras. It officially went into 24-hour use on Tuesday.

Fresno police chief Jerry Dyer describes the department's new Real Time Crime Center, a privately-funded computer hub located in police headquarters and designed to monitor the network of cameras and sensors throughout city streets. Photographed Tuesday, July 7, 2015 in Fresno, Calif. | ERIC PAUL ZAMORA ezamora@fresnobee.com

"It's an extremely difficult time," Dyer said. "Officers are expected to know the unknown and see the unseen..."

Real Time Crime Center is designed to provide information and allow for more informed decisions."

Any high-priority 911 calls, defined as in-progress or life-threatening crimes, will now be filtered through a database to assess any possible threats an officer may encounter while responding.

The Fresno Police Department responds to around 2,700 dispatch calls per day.

Dyer said police receive about 600 such calls per day out of the 1,200-1,300 911 calls fielded by dispatchers daily.

The database goes through all public information for the call's location — from arrest records to pizza deliveries — and gives the address a rating. Green means minimal threat, yellow a possible threat and red a major threat. This is all done in a few seconds.

The system shows officers three pieces of data: the threat level, the criminal history of anyone living at the home and a list of known friends and family members. This list sometimes includes possible phone numbers and addresses of these associates. Dyer said this is useful in case police are looking to contact someone locked in a home, notify family members of an injured person or locate a suspect.

Dyer acknowledged that it was possible for a home to be given a red threat level because someone associated with it once had a violent conviction. For example, if a homeowner's brother had mail forwarded to that address while in prison on a gun crime, that home could now be a red-threat home.

The center also allows officers to access a massive array of surveillance cameras.

As of Tuesday, the department has access to 180 video policing cameras placed at various intersections and public buildings, as well as the 140 traffic cameras owned by the city. The department has also partnered with Fresno Unified School District, giving the center access to the district's 750 cameras.

Real Time Crime Center also will have access to the more than 400 police officer body cameras that will go into use by the end of 2015.



Dyer said the department has entered into an agreement with the River Park shopping center for use of its cameras. Similar negotiations are underway with local shopping malls, banks, hospitals, schools, convenience stores and retailers. This would give the department access to thousands more surveillance devices.

The department is also experimenting with two new traffic camera systems.

One is in use in two undisclosed intersections in Fresno, and it snaps photos of the license plates of every car that travels through.

The second system, known as Vigilant, is a group of mobile license plate readers that collect about 25,000 license plate screenshots per month. Should police decide to use this software, the department will have to pay \$50,000 per year to the software company.

All of these surveillance systems, Dyer said, will enhance officer safety. Operators within the center will be able to watch police responses live and provide information or call for back-up at a much faster pace.

He pointed to a situation in which Real Time Crime Center, which has been in-use on a part-time basis, has already helped officers.

On May 3, one camera caught a brawl between two officers and a suspect in front of the Target at First Street and Shields Avenue. Operators will be able to call in backup for the officers, each of whom were unable to reach their radios during the fight.

When asked about possible privacy issues, Dyer said the public tends to look at all technology advances through a "Big Brother" lens. He added that the video policing system has been in place since 2007 and was recently audited by a retired judge.

In 2014, former federal judge Oliver W. Wanger wrote a 36-page report on the system, saying it did not violate the public's civil rights.

Video policing cameras are not allowed to film protests unless criminal activity is going on.

Jeff Hammerschmidt, former legal counsel for the department and a former assistant district attorney, said several issues could arise that violate a person's Fourth Amendment right to privacy.

"It may create more problems than it solves," he said.

Hammerschmidt cautioned that these new developments must always be weighed against the potential infringement of rights.

He added that the issue will likely be resolved through further litigation, and he expects the issue of police surveillance to reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

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