

Police cameras have captured major developments in the field of law enforcement and have come a long way, since they were first introduced to the public in the late 1970's. At that time, they could only be found in police cruisers, and other vehicles that had been specially designed for this purpose. Now, police departments throughout the United States use body cameras, as do the court system. There are many pros and cons associated with body worn cameras, with many of them relating to the camera itself, as well as its placement, use, video retention and dissemination. An important discussion of some of these pros and cons, should be taking place nationwide as body cameras are becoming an important part of civilian and police everyday interactions.

One major benefit to having police body cameras is the video footage. In the event of an incident, the footage can help to establish the guilt or innocence of the involved parties. Prove or disprove police misconduct allegations. It can also help to document an arrest, so that evidence may be presented at trial if it is in the interests of justice. In addition, the recorded footage could be introduced as evidence at any future trial, should the need arise. As more details are added to the recording, it will be easier to determine exactly what occurred during the incident. In events such as national disasters or large scale events, like another Boston Marathon bombing, it is an invaluable investigative tool.

Body worn body cameras are much more affordable than their prior predecessors, which means that they are available for less in line with technology today. This allows many police departments to reduce the costs associated with purchasing the equipment. This is particularly important for smaller police departments, who typically have budget constraints.

Perhaps one of the most compelling benefits of police body cameras is the reduction in officer-related injuries. Police officers are often the first responding to domestic disputes or other types of emergencies where injuries may occur. It can be difficult for an officer to de-escalate a situation, and there are always the risks of injury if a confrontation goes beyond a reasonable threshold. Body worn cameras allow officers to be better prepared when making these kinds of decisions, which in turn can have a positive impact on police accountability. Without these devices, police officers may be placing themselves in unnecessary danger. Recorded footage is also an excellent training tool for new officers!

Additionally, as detailed documentation becomes more common throughout police departments, police body cameras also provide valuable information for lawyers representing plaintiffs suing police officers over excessive-force incidents. Since most of these devices are digital in nature, it is relatively easy to review the videos recorded in the field. In addition, there are no restrictions on how many times a recording may be shared among members of the department or the courts. It also helps with exonerating officers of wrongdoing when none has occurred.

There are also some disadvantages to using police body cameras. One major disadvantage is the cost. While body-worn video cameras have become relatively affordable in recent years, outfitting a whole department can cost tens of thousands of dollars for a medium sized agency. Additionally, cameras must be used in conjunction with a video monitoring system that can increase costs significantly. The most exorbitant cost though is evidence retention. Servers to store digital evidence are expensive and must be maintained and safeguarded. However, these systems typically incorporate video analysis technology so that the videos recorded by the body worn cameras can be accessed easily for use in legal proceedings.

A real yet unwarranted con of body-worn video cameras is that while they can provide an incredible amount of trustworthiness, they do have their drawbacks. Because police body cameras record video footage with digital video recorder (DVR), the public believes there is the potential that the cop in question will delete key evidence from the recording. Because there is no way to restore deleted files, victims of police brutality and other criminal activity stand a far greater chance of being victimized again. This is not the case, the systems are not like home DVR systems, so educating the public is another cost this program incurs.

Some citizen groups cite that police body cameras invade the privacy of citizens in public places, and potentially exposing innocent people to being surveilled and be used in trials of facial recognition software.

Officers in many states that use body-worn camera footage in investigations say it helps with the number of unfounded arrests and unnecessary use of force complaints. However, some police officers are quoted as saying that the cameras may influence officers from using discretion instead of arresting for minor infractions. Another reason why officers are quoted as saying that they are happy with the results of body-worn cameras is that criminals are becoming more aware that they are being videotaped. Criminals know that an encounter can often be recorded and reviewed later, and this helps with compliance.

The benefit to the public should outweigh the costs incurred by police. Body worn cameras make it safer for everyone.