

Performance Audit of SDPD's Use and Management of Body Cameras

Why OCA Did This Study

SDPD officers can face dangerous situations while on duty, and public interactions with officers can result in the injury or even death of a member of the public or an officer. As a result, body cameras are used to improve officer and public safety, providing additional documentation of police encounters with the public and functioning as important evidence collection and accountability tools. We conducted a performance audit with two objectives:

- (1) Determine if SDPD's policies and procedures regarding body worn camera usage, management, and video release are in line with best practices and local, state, and federal regulations.
- (2) Determine if internal controls are in place to ensure policies and procedures are followed and body worn camera footage is properly collected, maintained, monitored, and released by appropriate personnel.



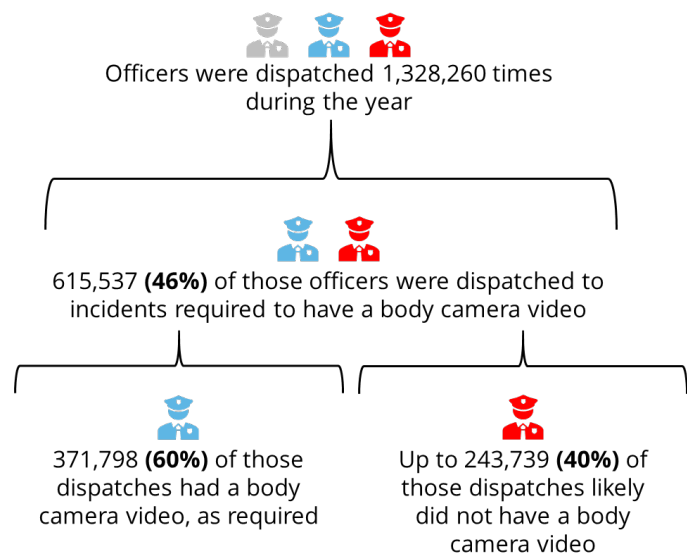
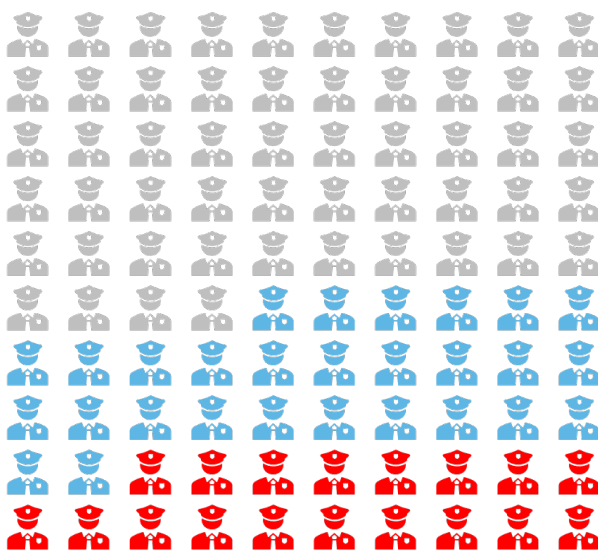
Source: OCA photograph taken at SDPD facility.

What OCA Found

Finding 1: Officers likely did not record many enforcement encounters, as required.

- SDPD procedure requires officers to record incidents that have "the potential to involve an enforcement contact."
- 15 to 40 percent of officers dispatched to potential enforcement encounters from October 2020 through September 2021 did not record a video as required.

- For example, 29 percent of officers dispatched to incidents that ended in arrest did not have record of a body camera video.
- 42 percent of officers dispatched to calls relating to an assault with a deadly weapon did not have a record of a video.
- 41 percent of officers dispatched to calls of battery did not have a record of a video.








Source: OCA generated based on dispatch data and body camera video data provided by SDPD.

Finding 1 (continued):

- 4 percent of enforcement encounters likely had no body camera video recorded by any officer dispatched.
- Many other major cities simply require officers to begin recording while on the way to all calls for service, making it easier for officers to comply and ensure videos are captured when required.

Finding 2: In many cases, officers did not appear to record the entire incident, as required.

- Officers did not begin recording on the way to an incident, as required, in 30 percent of the body camera videos we reviewed.
- Officers stopped recording before the incident appeared to conclude in 38 percent of the videos we reviewed.
- SDPD procedure does not clarify when officers can stop recording.

-  91% of videos reviewed included the full 2 minutes of buffering
-  30% of videos reviewed started recording after the officer was already on scene
-  38% of videos reviewed stopped recording before the incident appeared to conclude
-  Only 4% of videos reviewed were categorized incorrectly
-  0% of videos reviewed had officers who appeared to intentionally cover the camera or angled away from the scene

Source: OCA generated based on our review of body camera videos and video data provided by SDPD.

Finding 3: Officers generally categorized videos correctly.

- Just 4 percent of the videos we reviewed were categorized incorrectly.
- 98 percent of videos were kept as long as required and not deleted too soon.
- SDPD procedure keeps videos categorized as accidentally recorded for just one week but should keep them for a minimum of 60 days and should have supervisors review them to ensure they are accurately categorized as accidental.

Finding 4: SDPD does not have a detailed, public-facing policy on when it releases body camera video, creating confusion amongst stakeholders such as the City Council and the public.

- For the officer involved shootings in our scope, SDPD released the critical incident videos within 10 days and the videos included the most pertinent body camera video footage.
- We did not find any additional video footage in the underlying body camera video footage that would have substantially changed the impact or conclusions of the critical incident videos we reviewed.
- We did find that the underlying body camera footage in some situations held additional context that was not included in the critical incident video, such as the events that led up to the officer involved shooting or additional angles of the incident.
- For the California law that requires SDPD release body camera videos for officer involved shootings and uses of force that result in great bodily injury or death, we found SDPD releases the videos it determines are the most relevant.

What OCA Recommends

We made seven recommendations and SDPD agreed to all seven. Key recommendations include:

- Requiring officers to record all dispatched calls and calls for service, rather than just enforcement encounters.
- Clarifying in procedure when officers can stop recording because an incident has finished.
- Requiring existing supervisor reviews of body camera videos to ensure officers recorded a video for all dispatched calls and ensure officers turned the camera on and off in line with procedure.
- Requiring SDPD to keep accidentally recorded videos for 60 days and requiring supervisors to review them to ensure the videos are accidental recordings.
- Detailing in policy what body camera videos SDPD releases and when, including critical incident videos, and making the policy public to reduce stakeholder confusion.

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