



Surveillance Use Policy

Covert Audio Recording Devices
San Diego Police Department

PURPOSE

The San Diego Police Department utilizes covert audio recording devices (remote listening capable) to create objective real-time recordings to develop and further investigations and to protect undercover operators at risk during sensitive investigations.

USE

Covert audio recording devices (remote listening capable) are concealed pieces of equipment capable of recording audio data occurring within range of the microphone. The device is housed in such a way that the identity of the device is not immediately recognizable or is hidden or otherwise concealed. The devices capture valuable evidence by creating contemporaneous and objective audio records during undercover law enforcement operations. To increase the undercover operator's safety, the devices are capable of being remotely listened to by other SDPD members during an operation.

When a covert audio recording device (remote listening capable) is requested by a San Diego Police Department member, a Special Equipment Technician of the Robbery Unit will be assigned the request. The technician will speak with the SDPD member to fully understand the mission and how the device will be used. The request will be evaluated for equipment suitability and legal standing. If equipment deployment is appropriate, a request form will be completed stating the crime being investigated. The request form will then be reviewed for approval by a Robbery Sergeant and the Robbery Lieutenant. The SDPD member assigned the equipment is required to confirm the download of the necessary audio recordings and ensure the recordings are collected and categorized as per D.P. 3.02 Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property Evidence and D.P. 3.26 Media Evidence Recovery and Impounding / Preserving Procedures.

Once the SDPD member completes the investigation using the covert audio device (remote listening capable) it will be returned to the Robbery Unit. The Robbery Unit will download the required audio recordings and provide them to the assigned SDPD member for evidence as per D.P. 3.02 Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property Evidence and D.P. 3.26 Media Evidence Recovery and Impounding / Preserving Procedures. However, devices may be issued to a specific SDPD member on a permanent basis to facilitate logistical issues associated with needs arising during off-hour and short-notice deployments.

Department procedures associated with covert audio recording devices are:

- 3.02 - Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property Evidence
- 3.26 - Media Evidence Recovery and Impounding / Preserving Procedures.

DATA COLLECTION

The covert audio recording devices are manually operated and record directly onto the audio recording device. Once the recording and the investigative operation are complete, the device's audio files will be downloaded to an external media device by a member of the Robbery Unit and provided to the assigned SDPD member for impound in accordance with D.P. 3.02 Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property Evidence and D.P. 3.26 Media Evidence Recovery and Impounding / Preserving Procedures.



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The audio recording device will capture the audio of the surrounding area of the device. The devices will only be activated when needed in an investigation. The devices do not have any filtering capabilities and the audio files are saved as complete and whole to provide to the District Attorney and used in the discovery process as detailed in the California Evidence Code. If an audio file is created inadvertently the data will be deleted.

DATA ACCESS

Personnel authorized to use covert audio recording devices or authorized to access the data using such equipment shall be specifically trained in such technology and authorized by the Chief of Police or designee. Such personnel shall be limited to designated captains, lieutenants, sergeants, officers, detectives, and police department personnel unless otherwise authorized.

DATA PROTECTION

The covert audio recording device has local memory and is always in the possession of an authorized user during its use or deployment. Those authorized to have access to the data can listen from the device with the required software and drivers. The device can also be remotely listened to via a linked receiver radio when the device is on.

After the use of the device, the audio file that was created is downloaded onto an external media device, by an authorized user, to be impounded, controlled, and regulated as per D.P. 3.02 Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property Evidence and D.P. 3.26 Media Evidence Recovery and Impounding / Preserving Procedures.

DATA RETENTION

Once the authorized user has impounded the audio file physically, evidence retention is the responsibility of the SDPD Property Unit, and all such evidence is controlled and regulated by DP 3.02 Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property Evidence. After the audio file is impounded, the memory of the device will be erased, and no audio files shall be on the device before it is returned to the Robbery Unit inventory.

PUBLIC ACCESS

The public has no access to the covert audio recording device or any audio data it may collect.

Once the authorized user has impounded the audio file physically, evidence retention and access is the responsibility of the SDPD Property Unit and all such evidence is controlled and regulated by SDPD Procedure 3.02 – Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property, Evidence and Articles Missing Identification marks.

THIRD PARTY DATA SHARING

Audio files may be released to other authorized and verified law enforcement officials and agencies for legitimate law enforcement purposes, which includes criminal investigations and prosecution as allowed by law. The audio files will not be used in immigration enforcement.



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TRAINING

Individualized training is provided to new users by members of the Robbery Unit upon being issued their first device or when first granted access. Familiarity on operation and placement is also provided by members of the Robbery Unit.

AUDITING AND OVERSIGHT

Personnel who are authorized to use the covert audio recording device (remote listening capable) shall ensure that their access and use of the device comply with the Surveillance Ordinance.

The request forms shall be retained in the Robbery Unit and log who has access to the covert audio recording device, who was issued a device, and for what purpose. The request forms shall be available for presentation for all required internal and external audits, and oversight will be maintained by the system Program Manager or their designee.

MAINTENANCE

The San Diego Police Department shall maintain robust security procedures and practices, including operational, administrative, technical, and physical safeguards, to protect the covert audio information from unauthorized access, destruction, use, modification, or disclosure.

The Robbery Unit shall maintain the covert audio recording devices.