BODY-WORN CAMERAS

The use of body-worn cameras (BWC) is becoming more prevalent among law enforcement agencies in Washington State and specifically within Thurston County. The Tumwater Police Department (TPD) has had in-car cameras (known as Mobile Audio Visual or MAV) since the late 1990s and has continuously assessed the value of BWCs for the last ten years. This is an update into the impact of BWCs in several key areas, as well as an analysis of the implementation costs of BWCs for TPD.

BODY CAMERA BASICS

BWCs continuously record video, with footage being saved upon activation. Footage is scheduled to automatically download when the officer returns to the station and will be retained according to a department's records retention plan. Camera activation is determined by agency policy and can be crafted to meet the needs of the community and the department. Some departments require that all commissioned officers, with the possible exception of the Chief of Police, wear BWCs and have them activated at all times they are outside the station. Other jurisdictions take a more focused approach, only requiring Patrol officers to wear them, only requiring activation for specific types of calls, or directing de-activation in certain venues or situations. BWCs are also equipped to record sound and sound recording starts simultaneously with the video recording upon activation.

BWCs are usually worn on an officer's chest and thus have a field of view based on that location. Generally, the view can effectively capture an interaction between an officer and another person if the two are standing at a normal distance for conversation. When an officer is closer to a subject, the field narrows considerably. Additionally, because they are worn on the exterior of the officer's uniform, they capture images from that perspective and can become obscured during person-to-person contact.

RESEARCH ABOUT BODY-WORN CAMERAS

BWCs and their use by law enforcement have now been researched extensively. The result has been a much greater understanding of their impact on public perception of transparency, use of force, police complaints, and other topics.

Initially, research was limited to departments that had been using BWCs for only short periods of time, often in limited situations, and sometimes with only a few officers within a jurisdiction because they were new technology with relatively few users. In an early U.S. Department of Justice report, the "perceived benefits" of BWC were summarized as:

- Increased transparency and citizen views of police legitimacy;
- Decreased Use of Force events;
- Decreased Complaints against Officers and expedited resolution of citizen complaints; and
- Improved evidence for arrest and prosecution.

More robust research results, however, have been much more variable. The Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funds and comprehensively reviews research into BWC use. [1] The NIJ found that despite their widespread adoption, evidence regarding the impact of BWC is mixed and often contradictory. The table below summarizes the findings in the studies reviewed by NIJ, showing whether the impact was found to increase, decrease, or not change with the adoption of BWCs:

Type of Impact	Statistically Significant Increase	Statistically Significant Decrease	No Statistically Significant Impact
Uses of Force	✓	✓	✓
Citizen Complaints		✓	✓
Citizen Injuries		✓	
Citizen fatalities			✓
Officer Injuries			✓
Proactive Activities by Officers		✓	✓
Arrests and/or Citations	✓		✓

The studies suggest that some of the findings above represent the intersection of impacts: when officers with BWC engage in less proactive activities, uses of force may go down. Rather than the BWCs themselves acting as a deterrent to using force, the BWCs may discourage officer/community interaction which, in turn, reduces the opportunity for force to be used. For example, one study showed that departments with BWC have shown 38% fewer use of force incidents, but also 46% fewer citizen stops and 39% fewer arrests, demonstrating the impact of BWC on officer activities. Conversely, other studies showed that when officer proactivity declined, arrests increased as officers used less discretion. The increased arrests raise the likelihood of increases in uses of force.[2]

There is no universal metric for BWC "success" and local context matters. How, and whether, behavior and perceptions change when BWCs are implemented is dependent on such things as the perceptions of police legitimacy, the pre-existing relationship between the community and their police department, and the demographics of the population.

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[1] Research on Body-Worn Cameras and Law Enforcement | National Institute of Justice (ojp.gov)

[2] Groff, E. R., Haberman, C., & Wood, J. D. (2020). The effects of body-worn cameras on police-citizen encounters and police activity: Evaluation of a pilot implementation in Philadelphia, PA. *Journal of experimental criminology*, *16*, 463-480.

Huff, J., Katz, C. M., & Hedberg, E. C. (2020). A randomized controlled trial of the impact of body-worn camera activation on the outcomes of individual incidents. *Journal of experimental criminology*, 1-26.

Program Profile: Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Police Department Body-Worn Cameras | CrimeSolutions, National Institute of Justice (ojp.gov)

Program Profile: Police Body-Worn Cameras (Phoenix, Arizona) | CrimeSolutions, National Institute of Justice (ojp.gov)

TRANSPARENCY

Generally, research demonstrates that BWC increases perceptions of transparency, which positively impacts police-community relations. BWC implementation is perceived to enhance accountability for both the department and the community because it is assumed that it provides an eye-witness account of an event. However, community support is heavily dependent on the availability of BWC footage. Missing or unreleased video can negatively impact the impression of transparency. Strict BWC activation policies, along with departmental policies requiring prompt release of videos have been shown to bolster the feeling of transparency within the community. The availability of camera footage must be coupled with internal investigations and disciplinary actions that are transparent, rigorous, and fair to the community or the transparency effect of the BWCs will be nullified.

At the same time, there is tension between individual needs for privacy and the public's desire to know about an incident. Those videos that are of the most public interest are also the ones that are the most traumatic for the individuals involved and their families. Balancing those opposing needs can create a no-win situation, leading to a negative view of policing.

OFFICER IMPACTS

The ways in which officers interact with citizens are highlighted by BWC and are placed under new and additional scrutiny. Officer self-awareness regarding BWCs is critical as every aspect of their behavior can be scrutinized, not just internally but in the public domain, and may be replayed over and over again. Even an interaction that is "textbook" can be taken out of context and distorted. Public scrutiny of BWC footage can increase transparency and improve police-community relationships but can also strain those relationships by raising questions about officer competence, integrity, and behavior.

One area that stands out in BWC research is that BWCs substantially increases officer stress, anxiety, and mental fatigue. Self-reported data clearly demonstrates that officers wearing BWC report higher levels of burnout compared to officers who do not. [3] Organizational support can mitigate some effects, but the negative impacts of BWC on officer wellness are compelling.

ADMINISTRATION IMPACTS

Administrative staff are also impacted by the deployment of BWCs. BWC videos represent a significant increase in the overall volume of police records, all of which require detailed management. While we currently maintain case files and MAV, BWC video will add a third, entirely new record inventory. One that will exceed all other current record inventory by volume. Videos must be associated with the other relevant case records that are held in separate databases. They also need to be indexed for retention, according to State regulations specific to law enforcement.

As noted above, the public is very interested in viewing video recordings of an event, even events that are not controversial. We have already seen a substantial increase in requests for MAV records and BWC

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[3] Adams, I., & Mastracci, S. (2019). Police body-worn cameras: Effects on officers' burnout and perceived organizational support. *Police quarterly*, *22*(1), 5-30.

Doiron, C. (2021). BODY-WORN CAMERAS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS IN CANADIAN POLICING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY.

Hansen Löfstrand, C., & Backman, C. (2021). Control or protection? Work environment implications of police body-worn cameras. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, *36*(3), 327-347.

footage is expected to be an even more popular request. The release of BWC videos is governed by different laws than those relating to case reports and MAV which administrative staff will need to understand and apply. The technical aspects of redacting videos require both considerable time, new skills, and video editing equipment. All video must be reviewed in near real time, multiplied by the number of BWCs, and any required redactions completed.

All of these issues considerably increase the workload of providing records to the public. At the very least, TPD will require an additional Police Service Specialist 1 (PSS1) position to address the additional workload. It is also possible that a Public Disclosure Supervisor will be needed to manage the records unit and to provide professional expertise with regard to public disclosure laws. As it relates to public disclosure, BWCs add even more complexity to an already high risk area.

Additionally, our experience with MAV has demonstrated that camera systems require IT staff to manage software and hardware issues. The technological impact involved with outfitting all or most of the commissioned staff with BWC is considerable. City IT is already stretched to support the large amount of technology that TPD uses and they have identified the need to add additional capacity if we add a BWC system. An additional IT staff member who can manage the integration and ongoing support of a BWC system will be needed.

Finally, implementing BWCs will require additional oversight, supervision, and management. Historically, when we have added tools and systems, we have absorbed the supervision and management of them with existing resources. This will not be possible with a BWC program given the scope of the program and the fact that our current supervisors and managers are already near capacity. To implement and maintain a BWC program we will need to add an additional sergeant position. The research shows that questions and complaints can increase once BWC is available to the public. A sergeant is in the best position to answer questions about actions seen on videos, having the most intimate knowledge of patrol operations. If any personnel investigation is needed, those duties may lie with the sergeant. Additionally, supervisory-level staff is needed to organize the deployment and maintenance of the equipment.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

The annual costs of a BWC program come largely from three areas: the cost of equipment, the cost of video storage, and the additional staffing needed when BWCs are in place. This information was compiled from discussions with local agencies on the impacts of BWC programs and applied to TPD operations:

Estimated Annual Costs		
ITEM	**ANNUAL COSTS (2024)**	**NOTES**
BWC Annual cost	$ 54,145	Based on LPD's costs
Redaction software	$ 4,800	4 licenses @ $100/mo
Guild increase for BWCs	$ 81,480	2% increase of base pay anticipated
Police Service Specialist 1 (PSS1)	$ 86,369	Mid-range, with benefits
Sergeant	$ 200,122	Mid-range, with benefits
IT Specialist	$ 107,856	Mid-range, with benefits
	$ 534,771	

There are also one-time costs that would be incurred at the beginning of a BWC project:

Estimated One-Time Costs		
ITEM	**ONE-TIME COSTS**	**NOTES**
Data switch	$ 35,000	For intradevice communication
Wiring	$ 20,000	For charging stations
Vest carrier replacement	$ 15,000	New vests/uniforms designed for BWCs
	$ 70,000	

There are additional anticipated costs that are unknown at this time:

Unknown Costs	
ITEM	**NOTES**
New office space	The Station is currently completely full. To add a Sergeant, IT Specialist, and PSS1 will require additional space.
Public Disclosure Supervisor	To manage records program and provide public disclosure expertise.
Cloud storage	Anticipate increasing costs for digital storage.