

Body Worn Camera (BWC) FAQ

What is a body-worn camera (BWC)?

A BWC is a relatively small device which is attached to an officer's uniform and records interactions between community members and the police officer. Cameras capture both audio and video through a forward facing view camera. The video/audio recordings are then downloaded onto a digital storage platform where the encrypted evidence can be managed.

How does an officer's BWC work? And how is a BWC different from a dashboard camera or CCTV system?

The BWC's include a front facing screen, one touch record button, and up to 12-hours of battery life. A dashboard camera is affixed to the vehicle, therefore only capturing images from the front of the vehicle. BWC's allow the footage to accompany the officer's movements. Closed Circuit Television Cameras (CCTV's) are also stationary systems, monitoring public spaces, without audio, for crimes in progress.

What are some of the primary limitations of a BWC?

1. A BWC does not follow an officer's eyes or see as they see.
2. Camera speeds differ from real life.
3. An officer's body may block the camera view.
4. A camera can never replace a thorough investigation.
5. Cameras may not see as well as the human eye in low light.
6. The camera only provides one angle of a scene.

Why is UNLV Police Services beginning to use BWC's?

The video and audio recordings captured by BWC's can be used by law enforcement to:

1. demonstrate transparency and openness with the community
2. document statements, observations, behaviors, and other evidence

3. deter unprofessional, illegal, or inappropriate behaviors by both law enforcement and the public.

According to the Police Executive Research Forum, departments that have begun deploying BWC's have reported improvement in the performance of officers as well as conduct of community members who are recorded. They have also found benefits in preventing and resolving complaints as well as with officer training and performance.

Who is allowed to watch these videos? Will BWC footage end up online?

Officers are prohibited from accessing recorded data for personal use, and from uploading data to public web sites. The body camera technology ensures that users cannot delete or overwrite footage, and the embedded encryptions make all footage restricted except on authorized computers. Additionally, a digital fingerprint tracks the file's chain-of-custody from the moment of capture.

How will the department handle public and media requests for video from officer BWC's?

A formal request must be submitted to the department, which will be reviewed with consideration to protect the privacy rights of everyone involved in an incident. Select video footage may be redacted to maintain the privacy of an individual. The department must provide clear reasoning for declining to release a video.

What will prompt an officer to activate a BWC?

Policy states that with every citizen contact an officer must activate the BWC to ensure there is no ambiguity regarding the purpose of the stop; whether it be: consensual contact, investigative inquiry, or an arrest for probable cause. Officers are encouraged to let people know they are recording, to encourage elevated behaviors on both sides, and help to deescalate a potential situation.

Is an officer allowed to turn off their BWC during an investigation or incident?

In some cases yes, depending on the victim, the crime, and/or the location of the incident. There is a delicate balance involved which considers the evidentiary value of a recorded statement and the interests of a victim or witness who would prefer not have their images recorded. This discretion is guided by a carefully crafted policy.

Nevada is a two-party consent state. Therefore, if the victim is a child, or requests not to be videotaped the camera can be turned off. If an officer has consensual contact in the home of an individual where no crime is in progress, the camera can also be turned off to respect the privacy of the individual. However, if the officer is involved in an investigative detention or is enforcing an incident, the camera will remain on.

Are BWC recordings confidential, and how long will the department retain the records?

No, BWC footage is considered public record. Video is retained for 30 days unless it contains footage of a significant incident or crime, in which case it is submitted and retained as evidence. The retention period is based on the NSHE record retention policy governed by Nevada state law.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Assistant Chief Sandy Seda at (702) 895-5046 or at sandy.seda@unlv.edu.