

	PALACIOS POLICE DEPARTMENT	
	Policy 7.9 Citizen or Media Recording of Police Activity	
	Effective Date:1/04/2021	Replaces:02/07/2006
	Approved: <i>Milton Rivera</i> Milton Rivera, Chief of Police	
	Reference:	

I. POLICY

It is the policy of this department that the seizure and searching of portable video, audio, and photo recording devices shall be governed by federal constitutional and statutory laws as well as departmental investigatory policies.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines and procedures for investigation, seizure, and searching of portable video, audio, and photo recording devices that contain data of an evidentiary value pertaining to a criminal act.

III. PROCEDURES

A. General

1. The department recognizes that the taking of photographs and/or videos by private citizens and media personnel is permitted within areas open to general public access and occupancy and is protected by the First Amendment.
2. Any civilian or media personnel may video record or photograph a police employee's activities as long as he/she abides by the following guidelines:
 - a. Remains at a distance that does not physically interfere with the officers' duties;
 - b. Does not physically interfere with the duties and responsibilities of law-enforcement personnel;
 - c. Does not violate any existing statute while taping, e.g. stand in the roadway while filming.
3. Employees are prohibited from seizing a person's portable video, audio, and/or photo-recording devices.

B. Initial Contact of an Individual Non-Media Photographer or Videographer: Officers are reminded that there are only three types of encounters between civilians and officers: consensual encounters, temporary detentions based upon reasonable suspicion of criminal activity and an arrest based upon probable cause. It is not a crime to videotape or photograph the police. A sworn employee may only contact a person recording images pursuant to these established rules of contact. Sworn employees shall follow the guidelines below:

1. Determine if the encounter is to be consensual in nature, or a lawful seizure;
2. Announce his/her authority and identity;
3. Plain clothes sworn employees shall identify themselves by prominently displaying departmental credentials;
4. Advise the individual of the purpose of the contact;
5. Ask the individual whether he/she recorded/captured data relevant to the incident;
6. Request that the individual provide his or her personal identification and contact information;
7. The encounter can last no longer than necessary to effect its purpose.

8. Persons who have been detained, as witnesses or suspects, or those who are participating in a consensual encounter, do not have to give their names, produce identification, or answer questions.

C. Consent to Search and/or Seize Portable Video, Audio, and/or Photo Recording Devices belonging to an Individual (Non-Media Photographer/Videographer)

1. Sworn employees may ask an individual for consent to a search and/or seize a portable photo and/or video recording device to determine if data of evidentiary value pertaining to a criminal act is present.
2. The employee's supervisor shall be notified immediately after any seizure and prior to any search of the device.
The supervisor shall determine whether an immediate search is warranted or a CIU detective should respond.
3. If a consensual seizure occurs, the property shall be inventoried and documented by the seizing sworn employee pursuant to Property and Evidence policy and procedures.
4. Authorization to search the device shall be documented by the seizing sworn employee on a consent-to-search form.
5. The seizing sworn employee shall accurately and completely document the basis for the seizure and findings of the search in a case report/offense incident report.

D. Initial Stop of Media Personnel

1. A sworn employee who stops a media photographer/videographer believed to have recorded/captured data of evidentiary value pertaining to a criminal act shall do the following:
 - a. Announce his/her authority and identity
 - b. Non-uniform sworn employees shall identify themselves by prominently displaying departmental credentials
 - c. Advise the media person of the purpose of the stop
 - d. Ask the media person whether he/she recorded/captured data relevant to the incident
 - e. If the media person acknowledges recording/capturing relevant data and agrees to allow review and/or supply a copy to the department, the sworn employee shall do the following:
 - i. Immediately notify his/her supervisor and CIU
 - ii. Collect and document receipt of the data pursuant to Evidence policies and procedures.
 - iii. Document the request and response on a case report/offense incident report.
 - f. If the media person acknowledges recording/capturing relevant data and refuses to allow review and/or provide a copy of the recorded/captured relevant data, or refuses to state whether he/she recorded/captured relevant data, the sworn employee shall do the following:
 - i. Immediately notify his supervisor and CIU
 - ii. Instruct the media person not to destroy, alter, or delete the recorded/captured relevant data
 - iii. Document the request and refusal on a case report/offense incident report
 - iv. Assist CIU to prepare appropriate subpoena and/or warrant documents for production of the requested data
 - v. Request that the media person provide their personal identification, media credentials, and contact information.
 - g. The stop shall last no longer than necessary to effect its purpose. NOTE: Brevity is important in determining whether a stop is reasonable. A prolonged stop may be warranted if the employee reasonably and diligently pursues investigative means to determine whether the media person possesses data that may have evidentiary value, and to confirm the person's identity.
2. Sworn employees shall not seize portable video, audio, and/or photo recording devices from media personnel unless they are under arrest or otherwise directly involved in the criminal act.
3. A warrantless search of portable video and/or photo recording devices seized incident to the direct involvement or arrest of media personnel is prohibited unless there is reason to believe that the immediate search of such materials is necessary to prevent the death of, or serious bodily injury to, a human being.

E. Supervisory Notification

1. The employee's supervisor shall be notified immediately after the seizure of a portable video, audio and/or recording device, whether consensual or non-consensual, and advised of the following:
 - a. The totality of the circumstances surrounding the stop and seizure
 - b. The type of device seized
 - c. The status of the person from whom the device was seized (e.g. detained, arrested, etc.).

F. Supervisor's Responsibilities

1. The supervisor shall do the following:
 - a. Immediately respond to the scene
 - b. Ensure that the circumstances surrounding the seizure as conveyed by the sworn employee are serious enough to warrant the seizure, and that the actions of the officer were in compliance with this general order and the department's SOP.
 - c. If the supervisor determines that the stop and seizure is appropriate, he/she shall determine whether or not a search warrant is appropriate.
 - d. If the supervisor determines that the seizure is not appropriate, he/she will ensure that the portable video and/or photo recording device is immediately returned, and the person detained is made whole.
 - e. The supervisor shall document these findings in a case supplemental report/supplemental report.
 - f. Ensure that the seizing sworn employee documents the circumstances and actions taken in a case report/offense incident report.
 - g. Ensure that all required documentation is completed.
 - h. Ensure that proper evidence handling protocols are followed.
 - i. Ensure that the criminal investigations unit (CIU) has been notified.
 - j. Ensure that a use of force report is completed if necessary.
 - k. Ensure that any questions or concerns regarding the appropriateness of the stop and/or seizure shall be immediately directed to the next supervisory level in the chain-of-command.
 - l. Ensure that the public information office is notified, if the supervisor believes that is necessary.

G. Impounding of Property

A sworn employee who impounds any portable video, audio, or photo recording device shall follow department policy regarding property/evidence.

H. Prohibited Actions

1. Employees shall not order or participate in the destruction of any portable video, audio, or photo recording devices.
2. Employees shall not order or participate in the erasure, deletion, or destruction of digital, analog, or film evidence.
3. Employees shall not impede a person's right to photograph or video record an event unless that person's actions will have any of the following effects:
 - a. Endangering the safety of the public, employees, or property
 - b. Interfering with an active crime scene
 - c. Violate an existing statute

I. Statutory Limitations and Liability

1. Pursuant to federal statute, 42 USC Section 2000aa-6, it is unlawful for a sworn officer or employee, in connection with an investigation or prosecution of a criminal offense, to search for or seize the work product of a media photographer or videographer except in the following circumstances:
 - a. There is reason to believe that the immediate seizure of such materials is necessary to prevent the death of, or serious bodily injury to, a human being;
 - b. There is probable cause to believe that the person possessing such materials has committed or is committing the criminal offense to which the materials relate.
2. A search or seizure of the work product is prohibited when the offense is merely the withholding of such material.
3. Sworn officers and employees may be held personally liable in an action for civil damages for violation of federal statute, 42 USC Section 2000aa-6.