



## Policing in the 21st Century

with Cole Zercoe

# Body camera study: Denver police see drop in arrests, UOF complaints

**According to a summary, officers involved in the study district were 18 percent less likely to make an arrest when compared to other Denver cops**

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The University of Cambridge, in partnership with the Denver (Colo.) Police Department, has released their findings after studying the effects of body-worn cameras on officers and the community in which they police.

105 officers assigned to the city's downtown business and entertainment district (one of the busiest in the city) were outfitted with TASER Axon body-worn cameras from July 1 to Dec 21, 2014, which TASER International loaned to the agency for the purpose of the study. During the course of the study, 23,060 police interactions were recorded.

According to Denver Police Commander Magen Dodge, who heads the department's body-worn camera program, the agency chose the district because of the traffic volume (high number of work commuters and extensive nightlife) and the likelihood that officers assigned to the beat would capture the full range of incidents cops respond to while on patrol.

Prior to the commencement of the study, the DPD conducted awareness campaigns consisting of PSAs, press releases, and media coverage to inform the public that they were implementing a body-worn camera program.

Although arrest and use-of-force rates decreased *city-wide*, according to an executive summary of the findings, police officers involved in the study district were 18 percent less likely to make an arrest and 8 percent less likely to use force when compared to Denver police officers outside of the district (who were not equipped with body cameras).

"It's been well-documented that behavior changes when people know they are being recorded. We encouraged our officers to let people know they were being recorded if they believed it would help diffuse the situation," Dodge said.

Denver's laws do not require an officer to inform a subject that they are being filmed.

In some instances, Dodge said, informing a subject that they are on video has been found to aggravate an encounter, so officers in the district were given full discretion to decide whether or not to inform a civilian about the cameras. Dodge said in many cases, officers reported back a positive change in a subject's demeanor after they were made aware of the presence of a camera.

The study concluded that while body-worn cameras did not significantly impact the occurrence of use of force in comparison with other districts, it did have a large impact on inappropriate force allegations. Officers in the district were 35 percent less likely to be the subject of a use of force complaint compared with other Denver police officers.

"One thing we were expecting was a decrease in use of force. But we were glad we didn't see a huge decrease – it shows our officers are judicious in their use of force and reporting on those incidents," Dodge said.

The study also found misconduct complaints were 14 percent more likely to occur with officers in the study district, and concluded that the outcome of those complaints was affected by use of the cameras. The technology resulted in a 47 percent decrease of "not sustained" complaint outcomes and a 41 percent decrease in the amount of investigation time spent on complaints.

The department plans on outfitting all of its officers with the technology in the near future, and recently secured a \$6.1 million contract to purchase the cameras for its police force.

### **About the author**

Cole Zercoe is the Associate Editor of PoliceOne, responsible for writing and editing news articles, original columns, product articles, and trade show coverage. From the latest police technologies and innovations to the emerging threats cops face in the digital age, his features focus on the complexity of policing in the modern world.

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