

Austin Police Department (APD) Body-Worn Cameras



Objective

Are Austin Police officers using body-worn cameras in accordance with APD policies, State law, and best practice guidance?

Background

APD started its body-worn camera program in 2015 to create greater transparency and accountability in its interactions with the public. As of April 2019, all sworn APD officers except for chiefs and commanders were assigned a body-worn camera. Officers are required to activate body-worn cameras when they respond to calls for service or have citizen contacts where they anticipate taking law enforcement action. Videos are stored in a cloud-based storage and management system called Evidence.com. As of April 2019, approximately 2 million videos have been uploaded to Evidence.com by APD officers.

What We Found

Finding 1: APD has set up the policies, training, and technology necessary to support the use of body-worn cameras. However, the department lacks oversight processes to ensure that all evidence is properly recorded and uploaded by officers.

APD has policies for the body-worn camera program that generally align with State law¹ and best practice.² To set up the program, the department purchased cameras and installed docks at all police substations. Officers have been trained on policies, use of cameras, and how to upload videos.

APD supervisors have not been conducting inspections of officers' body-worn camera videos. As a result, issues with officer use of body-worn cameras have not been properly detected and corrected. We reviewed video audit logs for the 151 body-worn camera videos that we tested in this audit and determined that only 1 video had been viewed by a supervisor.

A review of body-worn camera videos revealed that some videos were not started and stopped properly, camera view was sometimes blocked, and video categorization was not added consistently (see Exhibit 1).

The department does not have oversight processes to continuously monitor the program from a department-wide perspective. APD has processes to ensure proper upload, storage, and retention of evidence. APD does not have one person or group assigned to provide oversight of the body-worn camera program to ensure: all evidence is properly tagged, issues with use of body-worn cameras are addressed through training or policy updates, and program objectives are being achieved.

Finding 2: APD staff do not track the number of information requests received for body-worn camera evidence or body-worn camera video released or withheld.

¹ Texas Senate Bill 158, Amending Chapter 1701, Subchapter N of the Occupations Code

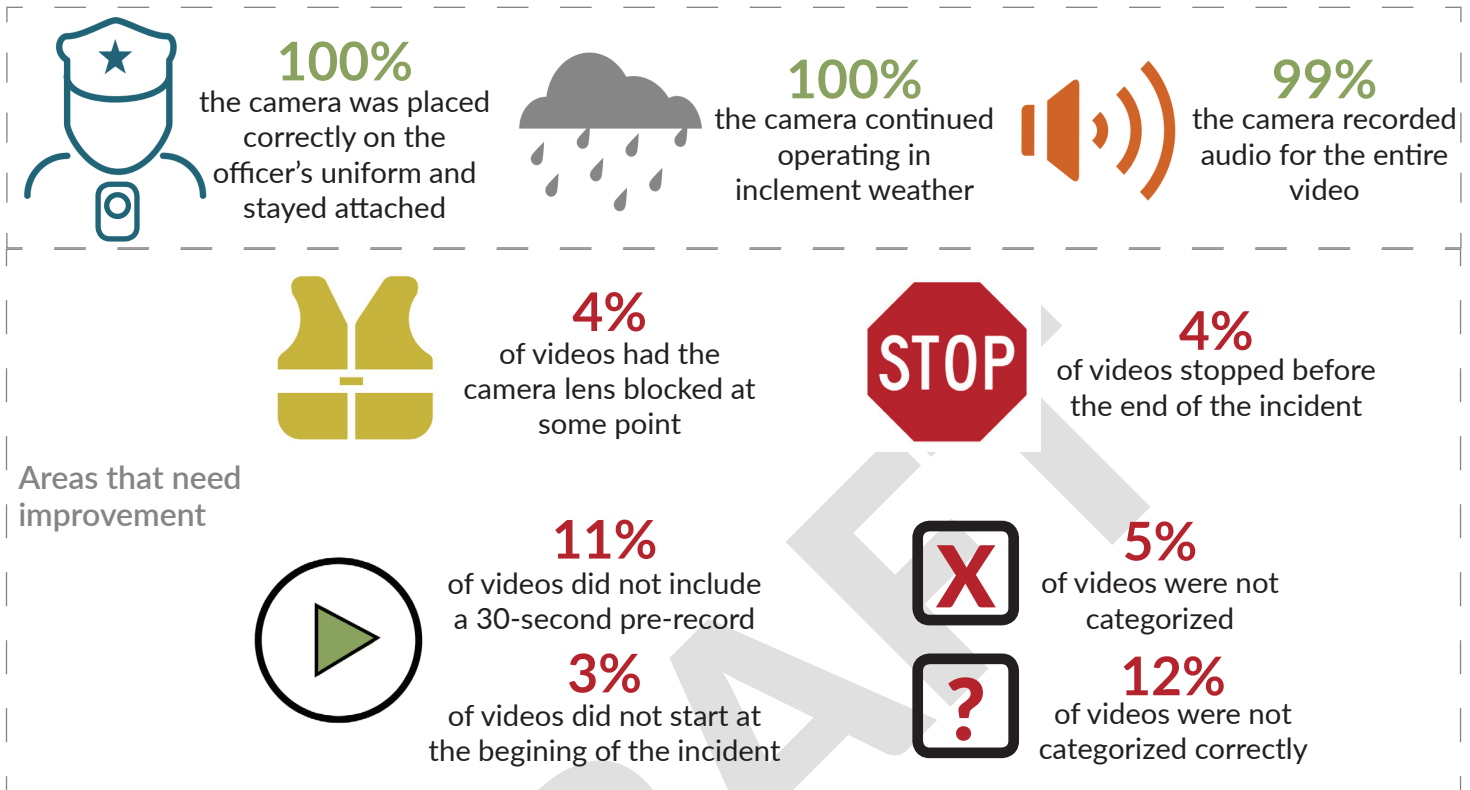
² International Association of Chiefs of Police model Body-Worn Camera Policy, April 2014

What We Recommend

The Chief of Police should ensure quarterly supervisory inspections are taking place; designate an individual within APD whose primary responsibility is oversight of the program; design, track, and report program goals; and regularly report on information requests related to body-worn camera video.

What We Found, Continued

Exhibit 1: Results from review of 151 body-worn camera videos



SOURCE: OCA review of 151 videos created between August 1, 2018 and January 31, 2019, April 2019.