



Surveillance City: Public workers, police to wear body cameras in Miami Beach

By William Patrick

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Miami Beach has a reputation for being Florida's fashion capital. True to form, city employees will soon be outfitted with a new accessory — body cameras.

The recording devices gained dramatic support in the aftermath of last month's disputed police shooting in Ferguson, Mo. Both cops and civil rights groups say the technology offers needed transparency.

But South Florida's posh resort community is taking it a step further.

As part of a new \$3 million plan, the city government is purchasing body-mounted cameras not just for law enforcement officers, but for a range of other municipal workers, including code enforcement, parking enforcement, building inspectors and fire inspectors.

[The city commission](#) claims Miami Beach is the first city in the country to expand the use of the equipment beyond police.

On the theory that more is better, city officials say the wearable video technology will provide additional security and protection for both city employees and the community.

“There is greater accountability to the residents and visitors to this community when they are interacting — whether it's with law enforcement or parking officials or building inspectors,” said Jimmy L. Morales, the city manager.

Police Chief Daniel Oates offered a somewhat different view: “Used properly, these cameras will document and capture evidence to put bad guys in jail and help protect the city in litigation.”

Some cop-cam supporters aren't buying it.

[Trevor Burrus](#), a research fellow at the [Cato Institute](#)'s Center for Constitutional Studies in Washington, D.C., [calls police cameras “essential”](#) for their capacity to create a record of law enforcement activity. Police work is often confrontational and sometimes lethal. A public record could better resolve ensuing legal disputes.

Burrus said he doesn't see the same benefits for other public jobs.

"Unless there's some sort of unique danger in those other professions, I'm not sure exactly what they could get from the cameras," Burrus told Watchdog.org. "It might be for data collecting purposes, but what could possibly justify that?"

"There's definitely some interesting privacy concerns," he added.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Florida also endorses on-body police cameras, but it rejects using the technology outside the realm of law enforcement.

"I am not aware of any cases of building inspectors shooting unarmed civilians in the course of their work," wrote Jay Stanley, senior policy analyst, in [an ACLU blog addressing the Miami Beach program](#).

"Deploying body cameras on these workers would bring all the downsides of police body cameras — including in some cases filming inside private homes — without any of the benefits."

The Miami Beach Police Department is set to receive an initial 50 to 60 cameras. The parking, code, fire and building departments will receive five cameras each. After a three-to-six month evaluation period, the city departments will obtain additional cameras for the next two years.

Watchdog.org contacted the city commission to inquire about privacy protections and was told the issue will be addressed in the standard operating procedures within each separate department.

"The goal here is to improve the public interaction between city officials and private citizens, not to intrude into the private domain of individuals," Morales, the city manager, said in an email.

The city commission will purchase two types of cameras both made by a tech company called [Taser](#). The police will use the Taser Axon Flex, [the same model used by the Sarasota Police Department](#). Other city workers will use the Taser Axon model.

"Don't forget that this costs money," said Burrus. "It's important to remember that when gauging whether useful information will be discovered."