

The Des Moines Register

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Ankeny police start wearing body cameras

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March 1, 2017

The Des Moines Police Department is one of three departments in the country getting a new body worn camera system that is high definition, panoramic in view and syncs the in car video system and the officer worn cameras. Rodney White/The Register

The Ankeny police department has a new way of documenting investigations and crimes going on in the city.

On Wednesday, Ankeny police started using body cameras for the first time, allowing officers to record investigations and other events they respond to.

"We're really comfortable moving the program forward," said Ankeny Police Chief Gary Mikulec. "It's consistent with the public approval to wear body cameras and we're confident we did a thorough job in our research "

Mikulec said a Cato/YouGov poll showed a majority of people were in favor of police officers wearing body cameras, with over 90 percent of people saying they support it.

A Des Moines Register/Mediacom Iowa Poll conducted in 2016 showed a majority of Iowans favor officers wearing body cameras with 76 percent saying they support it.

In 2015, the Ankeny City Council approved a budget that helped start the purchase of the body cameras, Mikulec said. He said the department researched different cameras to determine what would work best in Iowa's weather and provide a clear picture.

The department settled on purchasing 62 L3 Body Vision cameras for every officer. It shoots footage in high definition and color.

Purchasing the cameras and the needed equipment cost around \$80,000, Mikulec said. He said the police department has its own server that can store 32 terabytes of footage. The software for the body cameras is the same for the department's dashcams, saving the department money.

Typical interactions will be stored at a minimum of 90 days, Mikulec said. Footage used for investigations or may contain evidence will be stored for longer.

Lt. Brian Kroska, spokesman for the police department, said the body cameras can hold either 16 gigabytes or 32 gigabytes. The 32 gigabyte camera can hold up to nine hours of footage. He said they will be located on officers' upper torsos.

"If it helps improve evidence collection, public accountability, it's all good things," Kroska said. "If it helps resolve complaints against an officer, it's hard to refute what you see on video or better yet, what you hear they're saying"

Open record requests for the body camera footage will follow the state's open records laws, Mikulec said. However, he said body camera footage is something the Iowa legislature will need to address, particularly with the sensitive situations the cameras can capture.

"I expect the legislature to visit chapter 22 and records requests because it raises some significant privacy issues," Mikulec said. "If I'm in your house, should that be released if your neighbor makes that request? The law is not very clear in that way."

Earlier this year, Des Moines and Cedar Rapids, the state's two largest police departments, also started deploying body cameras on their officers.