



Live police documentary series will cover cops in real time

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Amidst concerns about police violence and calls for more transparency in policing, A&E is launching a live television that follows officers on Oct. 28.

"Live PD" will present officers around the country in real time, using dash cams, fixed rigs and handheld cameras to broadcast their work. The live coverage, with a time delay to avoid disturbing content, will switch between multiple police units depending on where the action is.

Back in the studio, news anchor and ABC television host Dan Abrams will provide commentary. He will be accompanied by two Dallas Police Department Detectives, Rich Emberlin and Kevin Jackson.

The show "will not only highlight the difficult work being done by our men and women in uniform as they go out into the streets never knowing what to expect, but also answers citizens' calls for clarity," Executive Vice President and General Manager of A&E Rob Sharenow said in a press release.

However Matthew Feeney, Policy Analyst at Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, told AMI Newswire that the show raises issues of privacy and authenticity. "I think it's valuable to increase transparency in law enforcement, but I'm not sure that this is the best way to do it," Feeney said.

"We should keep in mind some kind of observer effect," Feeney explained. "The officers will know that they're going to be on television and that undoubtedly will change behavior."

He predicted an effect similar to that seen with body cameras. A first of its kind study from the University of Cambridge's Institute of Criminology showed that body cameras help prevent escalation during interactions between police in the public. The 12-month experiment investigated policing in Rialto, California in 2012 and found that use of force by officers dropped 59 percent and reports against officers dropped 87 percent when police officers wore body cameras.

"Are the body cameras having more of an effect on the police officers or the citizens?" Feeney said. "Body cameras are a good tool for transparency with good policies, but without good policies they're quite a terrifying tool for surveillance."

Feeney said that the show raised questions of privacy, both for potential suspects and for regular citizens who might need to call the police.

“I am interested in the length of the delay because privacy worries emerge gradually but they also emerge very quickly,” Feeney said. “If you’re a homeowner and you see someone you think is suspicious and you call the police how are you supposed to know that not only the police will show up, but also cameras and a TV crew?”

Feeney said. “I would be interested in knowing more about the privacy policy that the producers have in place for the show.”

Producers at A&E did not answer requests for comment on the show and its privacy policies.

“Something that is obvious but perhaps not considered as often as it should be is officers are often engaging with people on the worst days of their lives,” Feeney said. “I find it interesting that so many people think of observing police this way as entertainment.”

The network has ordered eight, two-hour episodes of “Live PD.” It will run at 9 pm eastern time for eight weeks.