

Big brother is watching!?

Body worn cameras

Increasingly deployed by Security Services



The first significant deployment of **Body worn video camera (B.W.C.)** was in the U.K., in 2006, by the Police Standards Unit (PSU), as part of the Domestic Violence Enforcement Campaign (DVEC). The head mounted camera recorded, from the time of arrival, everything that happened during an incident. This led to the preservation of good-quality first disclosure evidence from the victim. Over the next 5 years, over 40 UK police areas have been using body cameras to varying degrees.

B.W.C. significantly improves the quality of the evidence provided by police officers at incidents. Video recording from the scene of an incident captures compelling evidence that could never be captured in a written statement. The evidence gathered is especially useful in supporting prosecutions if the victim is reluctant to give evidence or press charges.

What is a B.W.C.

Body worn cameras (B.W.C.) are like a CCTV installation on an individual. These are deployed typically by law enforcement personnel to record their interactions with the public or gather video evidence at crime scenes. This is believed to have increased both officer and citizen accountability. Cameras worn by police officers have demanding engineering requirements. They must be lightweight, operate for hours on a single charge, and generate crisp, clean imagery in a variety of challenging scenarios. They must have superior low-light performance, HD streaming capability and ultra-low power operation.

On body wearable cameras are becoming increasingly common among consumers as well. They are deployed life-logging, enhanced personal security, or simply more convenient video capture capabilities. These consumer cameras require high-quality video with sophisticated image stabilization, Wi-Fi support for instant sharing on social websites, low power consumption and form-factors that are both minimalist and attractive.

Video surveillance of police activity from an officer's point of view can serve as invaluable—and often indisputable—evidence inside a courtroom.

Typical Design

The early design included two components - a button for the officer to double click so the camera starts recording, and a lipstick-sized camera which would attach to any headgear or the officer's collar.



This design was meant to protect against error. The button was raised, so that the Officer can easily depress it. The double 'click' avoids the possibility of the camera being switched on inadvertently.

Other designs had a slider that turns the camera on, and is mounted onto the officer's chest.

Footage

If a camera is left on at all times, the volume of data is huge. This could run into several terra bytes! This is why most Security Services expect the Officer turn the device on when recording is necessary and turn them off when cleared to do so.

Some Security agencies prefer the cameras to capture feeds and stream the video, live, to the Police Station where an Officer on duty monitors the feed. The Officers wearing the B.W.C's are like walking security cameras with another Officer monitoring the live feed.

Storage

Some manufacturers offer 'cloud storage'. Others leave the storage option to the individual security agencies. **Most manufacturers do not provide a delete button and video once recorded, stays**

recorded. Only authorized personnel are allowed to view the footage. This works like a digital evidence room. People must be verified to access a video, and then their viewing is recorded — just as you would to enter evidence rooms in traditional police departments. The log also keeps track of what officers do to the footage. The original video remains saved for a specified number of days determined by the department.

The explosion in body cameras has created its own problem: what to do with all that data, and how to pay for storing it.

Benefits of B.W.C.

- Lowering Rates of Police Misconduct. — B.W.C.'s are an effective way to productively monitor police behaviour.
- Prevent and deter crime.
- Improved Resolution of Civilian Complaints – It has been reported that that complaints against the officers wearing the cameras has reduced significantly resulting in less Officer time spent on paperwork and more time spent on patrol.
- Providing Effective Evidence for Trials.
- Improved Officer Training.
- Increasing Accountability and Transparency.

Draw backs of B.W.C.

- **Control** - The very organization meant to be held accountable will potentially be able to prevent these videos from being created in the first instance or shared after the fact.
- **Public access to recorded video is restricted** - Many police departments, currently, do not allow private individuals or the media access to the recorded footage. Most, security agencies can deny access indefinitely.
- **Asymmetric access** to the footage is problematic - it allows officers, who have access to the footage, to adapt their testimony in order to bolster their credibility while civilian witnesses cannot do the same.
- **Privacy** - increasing transparency necessarily means more people will view body-camera footage, which will frequently feature civilians who may not want the recordings of themselves shared.
- **Costs and Storage** - Police departments will inevitably amass a colossal amount of footage, much of it likely irrelevant to any disputes over police-civilian interactions. The costs of storing and transmitting this data can be particularly staggering.

Conclusion

- Police body cameras have the potential to benefit citizens and officers alike.
- Storing the data generated by B.W.C.'s is a challenge.
- From an evidentiary standpoint, video evidence, will be overwhelming proof at a trial.
- The B.W.C. may not capture what happened outside the camera's view or the causation for actions shown. A lot would depend on the perspective of the camera (angles) and breadth of view (wide shots and focus)

- B.W.C.'s represent a significant step towards a 'surveillance state'!

Balancing the benefits and drawbacks of this powerful tool is of paramount importance.
