Tekst 7

Cops and Cameras

adapted from an article by Martin Kaste

1 Body-worn video cameras are quickly becoming standard-issue for American police, especially at departments in the process of reform. And in New Orleans, the troubled police department is now requiring almost all officers to wear the cameras. It has a dark history of corruption, racism and brutality. The low point may have been the Danziger Bridge episode, after Hurricane Katrina, when police shot unarmed people, then covered up the crime. The introduction of the cameras demonstrates the department's spirit of transparency. "They can help us have that unvarnished re-creation of what happened," New Orleans' superintendent of police Ronal Serpas says.

2 But what happens if an officer stops recording ─ say, right before someone gets roughed up? The chief says that kind of "selective recording" won't be tolerated. The department's body camera rules do not spell out the penalty for failing to record, though Serpas says a cop can be fired for being untruthful.

3 In the long run, the bigger problem may be a question of **__29__**: Ursula Price works for the Independent Police Monitor, the office that investigates potential cases of police misconduct. When Price first called the department to ask for a body camera video, she had high hopes. She was looking for footage of an arrest in which the suspect was bitten repeatedly by a police dog. When she asked for camera footage, an officer quickly told her that there wasn't any ─ and when she asked why, he said he didn't know. Later, he told Price that there is video, after all. But it took 2½ weeks for her to see it. She says the whole system for finding out what videos the police have is clunky. "There have been some problems dealing with getting permission to view things that are public records and people having to sue, and judgments against the department, and fines and fees and such for not following the public records rules."

4 Sam Walker, emeritus professor of criminal justice at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, is an expert on police accountability; he talks to chiefs all the time. "I've really been struck by the extent to which people just assume this is the coming thing," he says. Cameras are especially appealing to troubled police departments that are under federal scrutiny.

Video lets a department signal its devotion to openness — but for that to mean something, it can't look as if the videos are just for the benefit of the police. **31**, New Orleans has decided to let officers watch their own videos before writing reports; Walker says that's not a good idea. "If an officer is planning to lie, video is a good guide to what kind of lie he can get away with. And that could feed into a public perception that the right to view the videos is a police privilege."

5 In New Orleans, Lt. Travis St. Pierre is demonstrating the new technology to random citizens. He introduces himself to one pedestrian, who immediately asks, "What's wrong?" You can't blame the guy for being a little freaked out. St. Pierre's camera fits over his ear, and the effect is sort of Robocop-y. St. Pierre trains other cops on the cameras, and they've told him that the body cameras are changing behavior — on the part of the public. "They always have this one individual that likes to be disruptive, curse at the police, fight with the police, and when they got out and turned the camera on and informed her she was being recorded, she immediately said, 'Ah. OK,' and was not a problem at all. We're seeing a lot of that kind of stuff," St. Pierre says. It'll be interesting to see who ends up changing their behavior more in New Orleans — the police, or the people their cameras are pointing at.

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