

Squad Video Recorders

431.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Washington County Sheriff's Office has equipped marked patrol cars with Mobile Video Recording (MVR) systems to provide records of events and assist deputies in the performance of their duties. This policy provides guidance on the use of these systems.

431.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Activate - Any process that causes the MVR system to transmit or store video or audio data in an active mode.

In-car camera system and Mobile Video Recorder (MVR) - Synonymous terms - that refer to any system that captures audio and video signals that is capable of installation in a vehicle and that includes at minimum, a camera, microphone, recorder and monitor.

Law Enforcement Operator (LEO) - Primarily a licensed peace officer but on occasion may be a non-licensed representative of the Office who is authorized and assigned to operate MVR-equipped vehicles to the extent consistent with Minn. Stat. § 169.98.

MGDPA - The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13.

MVR technician - Personnel certified or trained in the operational use and repair of MVRs, duplicating methods, storage and retrieval methods and procedures, and who possess a working knowledge of video forensics and evidentiary procedures.

Recorded media - Audio-video signals recorded or digitally stored on a storage device or portable media.

431.2 POLICY

It is the goal of the Washington County Sheriff's Office to use mobile video recorder (MVR) technology to more effectively fulfill the office's mission and to ensure these systems are used securely and efficiently.

431.2.1 MVR REMOTE MICROPHONE

Deputies assigned a vehicle with MVR equipment shall wear the remote microphone during their shift and activate it when the MVR is in use.

431.3 DEPUTY RESPONSIBILITIES

Prior to going into service each deputy will properly equip him/herself to record audio and video in the field. At the end of the shift each deputy will follow the established procedures for providing to the Office any recordings or used media and any other related equipment. Each deputy should have adequate recording media for the entire duty assignment. In the event a deputy works at a remote location and reports in only periodically additional recording media may be issued. Only

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Washington County Sheriff's Office identified and labeled media with tracking numbers is to be used.

At the start of each shift, deputies should test the MVR system operation in accordance with manufacturer specifications and office operating procedures and training.

System documentation is accomplished by the deputy recording his/her name, serial number, badge, or PIN number and the current date and time at the start and again at the end of each shift. If the system is malfunctioning, the deputy shall take the vehicle out of service unless a supervisor requests the vehicle remain in service.

431.4 ACTIVATION OF THE MVR

The MVR system is designed to turn on whenever the unit's emergency lights are activated. The system remains on until it is turned off manually. The audio portion is independently controlled and should be activated manually by the deputy whenever appropriate. When audio is being recorded the video will also record.

Operators are encouraged to narrate events using the audio recording so as to provide the best documentation for pretrial and courtroom presentation.

431.4.1 REQUIRED ACTIVATION OF THE MVR

This policy is not intended to describe every possible situation in which the MVR system may be used, although there are many situations where its use is appropriate. A deputy may activate the system any time the deputy believes its use would be appropriate and/or valuable to document an incident.

In some circumstances it is not possible to capture images of the incident due to conditions or the location of the camera. However the audio portion can be valuable evidence and is subject to the same activation requirements as the MVR. The MVR system should be activated in any of the following situations:

- (a) All field contacts involving actual or potential criminal conduct within video or audio range:
 - 1. Traffic stops (to include, but not limited to, traffic violations, stranded motorist assistance and all crime interdiction stops)
 - 2. Priority responses
 - 3. Vehicle pursuits
 - 4. Suspicious vehicles
 - 5. Arrests
 - 6. Vehicle searches
 - 7. Physical or verbal confrontations or use of force
 - 8. Prisoner transports
 - 9. Non-custody transports

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10. Pedestrian checks
 11. DWI investigations including field sobriety tests
 12. Consensual encounters
 13. Crimes in progress
 14. Responding to an in-progress call
 15. Medical incidents attended to by members of the Office
- (b) All self-initiated activity in which a deputy would normally notify 911 Communications Center
- (c) Any call for service involving a crime where the recorder may aid in the apprehension and/or prosecution of a suspect:
1. Family violence calls
 2. Disturbance of peace calls
 3. Offenses involving violence or weapons
- (d) Any other contact that becomes adversarial after the initial contact, in a situation that would not otherwise require recording
- (e) Any other circumstance where the deputy believes that a recording of an incident would be appropriate

431.4.2 CESSATION OF RECORDING

Once activated the MVR system should remain on until the incident has concluded. For purposes of this section conclusion of an incident has occurred when all arrests have been made, arrestees have been transported and all witnesses and victims have been interviewed. Recording may cease if a deputy is simply waiting for a tow truck or a family member to arrive, or in other similar situations.

431.4.3 WHEN ACTIVATION IS NOT REQUIRED

Activation of the MVR system is not required when exchanging information with other deputies or during breaks, lunch periods, when not in service or actively on patrol.

No member of this office may surreptitiously use County equipment to record a conversation of any other member of this office except with a court order or when lawfully authorized by the Sheriff or the authorized designee for the purpose of conducting a criminal or administrative investigation.

431.4.4 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Supervisors should determine if vehicles with non-functioning MVR systems should be placed into service. If these vehicles are placed into service, the appropriate documentation should be made, including notification of 911 Communications Center.

At reasonable intervals, supervisors should validate that:

- (a) Beginning and end-of-shift recording procedures are followed.

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- (b) Logs reflect the proper chain of custody, including:
 - 1. The tracking number of the MVR system media.
 - 2. The date it was issued.
 - 3. The law enforcement operator or the vehicle to which it was issued.
 - 4. The date it was submitted.
 - 5. Law enforcement operators submitting the media.
 - 6. Holds for evidence indication and tagging as required.
- (c) The operation of MVR systems by new employees is assessed and reviewed no less than biweekly.

When an incident arises that requires the immediate retrieval of the recorded media (e.g., serious crime scenes, peace officer-involved shootings, office-involved collisions), a supervisor shall respond to the scene and ensure that the appropriate supervisor, MVR technician or crime scene investigator properly retrieves the recorded media. The media may need to be treated as evidence and should be handled in accordance with current evidence procedures for recorded media. Copies may be distributed to investigators as appropriate to the investigation.

Supervisors may activate the MVR system remotely to monitor a developing situation such as a chase, riot or an event that may threaten public safety, officer safety or both, when the purpose is to obtain tactical information to assist in managing the event.

431.5 REVIEW OF MVR RECORDINGS

All recording media, recorded images and audio recordings are the property of the agency and subject to the provisions of the MGDPA. Dissemination outside of the agency is strictly prohibited except to the extent permitted or required under the MGDPA, Peace Officer Disciplinary Procedures Act or other applicable law.

To prevent damage to, or alteration of, the original recorded media, it shall not be copied, viewed or otherwise inserted into any device not approved by the office MVR technician or forensic media staff. When reasonably possible a copy of the original media shall be used for viewing (unless otherwise directed by the courts) to preserve the original media.

Recordings may be reviewed in any of the following situations.

- (a) For use when preparing reports or statements
- (b) By a supervisor investigating a specific act of deputy conduct
- (c) By a supervisor to assess deputy performance
- (d) To assess proper functioning of MVR systems
- (e) By office investigators, after approval of a supervisor, who are participating in an official investigation such as a personnel complaint, administrative inquiry or a criminal investigation
- (f) By office personnel who request to review recordings

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- (g) By a deputy who is captured on or referenced in the video or audio data and reviews and uses the data for any purpose relating to his/her employment
- (h) By court personnel through proper process or with permission of the Sheriff or the authorized designee
- (i) By the media through proper process or with an MGDPA request (Minn. Stat. § 13.01 et seq.)
- (j) To assess possible training value
- (k) Recordings may be shown for staff or public safety training purposes. If an involved deputy objects to showing a recording, his/her objection will be submitted to the staff to determine if the training value outweighs the deputy's objection

Employees desiring to view any previously uploaded or archived MVR recording should submit a request in writing to the Shift Commander. Approved requests should be forwarded to the MVR technician for processing.

In no event shall any recording be used or shown for the purpose of ridiculing or embarrassing any employee.

431.6 DOCUMENTING MVR USE

If any incident is recorded with either the video or audio system, the existence of that recording shall be documented in the deputy's report and/or comments. If a citation is issued, the deputy shall make a notation in the comments section of the case number indicating that the incident was recorded.

431.6.1 CAMERA SETTINGS

- (a) Washington County personnel shall not access or change the administrative settings within the MVR device without proper authorization. Authorization is implied to the Fleet Supervisor and their maintenance personnel.
- (b) Deputies are authorized to change the external settings on the camera only. (focus, etc)
- (c) Deputies shall confirm that the on screen information (counter, date, time, etc) display properly. If the information is not displayed or is not correct, the deputy shall immediately notify the Shift Commander.

431.7 RECORDING MEDIA STORAGE AND INTEGRITY

Once submitted for storage all recording media will be labeled and stored in a designated secure area. All recording media that is not booked in as evidence will be retained for a minimum of 180 days and disposed of in compliance with the established records retention schedule.

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431.7.1 COPIES OF ORIGINAL RECORDING MEDIA

Original recording media shall not be used for any purpose other than for initial review by a supervisor. Upon proper request a copy of the original recording media will be made for use as authorized in this policy.

Original recording media may only be released in response to a court order or upon approval by the Sheriff or the authorized designee. In the event an original recording is released to a court a copy shall be made and placed in storage until the original is returned.

431.7.2 MVR RECORDINGS AS EVIDENCE

Deputies who reasonably believe that an MVR recording is likely to contain evidence relevant to a criminal offense, potential claim against the deputy or against the Washington County Sheriff's Office should indicate this in an appropriate report. Deputies should ensure relevant recordings are preserved.

431.8 SYSTEM OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

- (a) MVR system vehicle installations should be based on officer safety requirements and vehicle and device manufacturer recommendations.
- (b) The MVR system should be configured to minimally record for 30 seconds prior to an event.
- (c) The MVR system may not be configured to record audio data occurring prior to activation.
- (d) To prevent bleed-over and/or noise from other MVRs in systems using low band transmitters (analog) only the primary LEO initiating the contact shall activate his/her audio recorder.
- (e) LEOs using digital transmitters that are individually synchronized to their individual MVR shall activate both audio and video recordings when responding in a support capacity in order to obtain additional perspectives of the incident scene.
- (f) With the exception of law enforcement radios or other emergency equipment other electronic devices should not be used within the law enforcement vehicle in order to intentionally interfere with the capability of the MVR system to record audio data.
- (g) LEOs shall not erase, alter, reuse, modify or tamper with MVR recordings. Only a supervisor, MVR technician or other approved designee may erase and reissue previously recorded recordings and may only do so pursuant to the provisions of this policy.
- (h) To prevent damage original recordings shall not be viewed on any equipment other than the equipment issued or authorized by the MVR technician.

431.9 TRAINING

Users of the MVR systems and supervisors shall successfully complete an approved course of instruction prior to being deployed with MVR systems in operational settings.