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ACCOUNTING FOR THE HUMAN ELEMENT:
Using Axon Respond for Automatic Camera Activation for Officers

St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office

> St. Lucie County, Florida lies on the Atlantic coast about 100 miles north of Miami. Its subtropical surroundings include urban and rural communities, with 325,000 residents spread across 688 square miles. To ensure the most rigorous standards of accountability to that community, St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office sought tools that maximized the value of body-worn cameras while also minimizing human error.

THE CHALLENGE

St. Lucie CSO is made up of about 750 members. Its deputies respond to around 2,000 dispatch calls a week. The department began using Axon Body 3 cameras in April 2021 and have now gone live with Axon Body 4 for all officers as of 2024. From the start, they implemented a policy that mandated officers activate their cameras when responding to all calls to ensure vital footage could be captured regardless of the scenario. But getting deputies to remember the extra step to activate the camera proved difficult, as it was something wholly new to get used to.

St. Lucie CSO Lt. Deron Brown identified this issue as the agency's number one problem with using body-worn cameras:

> "How do I get deputies who have never done this before in their entire career to just all of a sudden remember to turn this camera on?"

After all, deputies have a lot to remember and do when assigned to a dispatch. They must navigate to the scene, make sure to stay in radio contact, use their laptops to enter or look up information, and turn on their sirens and flashers if necessary. All of these steps help them gather context and prepare for the incident they're about to step into.

St. Lucie CSO found that officers sometimes remembered to activate their cameras only after they got to the scene, missing those first minutes of response that are often the most critical.

"When you're out on the scene and you don't have the correct body cam footage, it affects everything down the road," Lt. Brown said. "It affects you going to court. It affects records. It affects criminal investigations. Our court appearances have actually decreased because of body-worn camera footage — [so] missing a recording really hurts."

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Beyond impacting the officers themselves and the entire process, a missed activation also means additional work for the records department, who must reach out to determine whether a recording exists and why it was not included. Without a video, supervisors only gain a limited understanding of the officers' overall responses, and can't use footage of a certain incident to review and share for training purposes or personnel action when needed.

With all the ways that body-worn camera footage was important to the department in mind, Lt. Brown reminded deputies to activate their camera at every roll call. But compliance wasn't increasing and he was beginning to feel like a broken record. Though everyone at the department clearly knew the importance of camera footage, it was becoming clear that they could not rely on manual activations alone to solve their problem.

St. Lucie CSO needed a different approach to account for the human element in activating body-worn cameras.

THE SOLUTION

### / AXON IS DEDICATED TO HELPING PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENTS

Never miss a moment with a connected ecosystem of tools to capture critical evidence, every time. That dedication starts with building the hardware and software departments need to ensure they capture vital footage — like the Axon body-worn cameras St. Lucie CSO uses. It extends to thoughtfully designed features that make those pieces of hardware and software work together even more reliably, like Axon Signal technology, which automatically activates cameras based on critical events like drawing a firearm, and Video Recall, which allows users to retrieve footage from hours prior in the event that previous measures were not taken and a camera was not activated at all.

Part of this commitment to helping departments never miss a moment in the midst of an incident is remote Camera Activation feature through Axon Respond. The feature uses use a cellular signal to automatically start recording on an officer's body-worn camera based on configured criteria as they're dispatched to a call, signaling the camera to begin recording as soon as an officer's badge ID is assigned to a dispatch or when an officer enters a certain radius of the location of the call for service.

St. Lucie CSO was the first public safety department in its area to implement this feature. While deputies were still held individually accountable for ensuring they captured a recording, the Camera Activation feature began to provide a safety net to ensure footage was captured when it may not have been otherwise, and the timeframe of activation helped St. Lucie ensure officers were responding to calls in an efficient and timely manner.
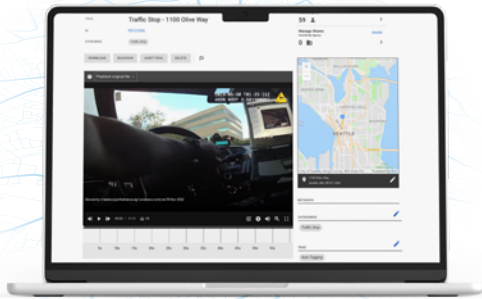
THE RESULTS

The Sheriff's Office noticed a substantial improvement in both the consistency of recordings and response time after implementing remote activation: "It's a big difference," Lt. Brown said.

> "Truly, it makes it better, because a CAD system is not forgetful. It will send that signal every single time, whereas a human might just forget to turn it on. It helps in taking the human error out of everything."

Remote activation helps the Sheriff's Office get closer to a complete record of truth for every critical interaction, accounting for 30-35% of camera activations at the agency in a given month, capturing critical footage that may otherwise have been lost. 63% of overall camera activations come from road patrol officers, the primary users of remote activation, even though road patrol users only account for 32% of the agency's Axon Body 4 users. Lt. Brown even started noticing remote-activated videos from deputies who usually remembered to turn on their cameras manually, increasing the rate of captured evidence even more, making the process more automatic and easier, and reducing the likelihood of missed activations.

Increased consistency in camera activation and footage capture was not the only improvement St. Lucie saw — they also saw more efficient response times. While deputies had always been to respond to potentially dangerous situations, Lt. Brown mentioned that some would take more time than they needed to respond to others, such as a community member discovering a break-in where the burglar had already come and gone. However, with the extra accountability of Camera Activation in place to get officers to less-urgent calls more quickly, the department started clearing calls much faster. Axon Body 4 instant live-streaming capabilities also allowed supervisors to verify the location and status of deputies who missed their radio check-ins, allowing them to ensure their staff were safe.

Meanwhile, Axon Auto-Tagging meant the increased volume of body-worn camera recordings remained easy to process. The system has now reached 98% effectiveness for automatically classifying videos, making them easy for the agency to find, sort, review and follow up on where needed.

With the implementation of the Camera Activation feature, St. Lucie CSO has been able to resolve many of their challenges around body-worn camera activation, ensuring that they can make the most of their body-worn camera investment by using the devices consistently and efficiently. The agency can be assured that their officers will capture vital footage for transparency and resolution of incidents, every time, minimizing the effects of human error through technology. The efficiency and safety benefits of automatic activation have empowered their officers to better serve their community.

Contact us **today to see how connected cameras and the suite of Axon products can work together to make your records more reliable while keeping officers safer.**