

Portable Audio/Video Recorders

422.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for the use of portable audio/video recording devices by members of this department while in the performance of their duties. Portable audio/video recording devices include all recording systems whether body-worn, hand-held or integrated into portable equipment.

This policy does not apply to mobile audio/video recordings, interviews or interrogations conducted at the Norwich Police Department headquarters facility, authorized undercover operations, wiretaps or eavesdropping (concealed listening devices).

422.2 POLICY

The Norwich Police Department may provide members with access to portable recorders, either audio or video or both, for use during the performance of their duties. The use of recorders is intended to enhance the mission of the Department by accurately capturing contacts between members of the Department and the public.

422.3 CHIEF OF POLICE

The Chief of Police will be responsible for:

- (a) Establishing procedures for the security, storage and maintenance of data and recordings.
- (b) Establishing procedures for accessing data and recordings.
- (c) Establishing procedures for logging or auditing access.
- (d) Establishing procedures for transferring, downloading, tagging or marking events.

422.4 MEMBER PRIVACY EXPECTATION

All recordings made by members on any department-issued device at any time, and any recording made while acting in an official capacity of this department, regardless of ownership of the device it was made on, shall remain the property of the Department. Members shall have no expectation of privacy or ownership interest in the content of these recordings.

422.5 MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

Prior to going into service, each uniformed member will be responsible for making sure that he/she is equipped with a body-worn camera (BWC), issued by the Department, and that the BWC is in good working order. If the BWC is not in working order or if the member becomes aware of a malfunction at any time, the member shall promptly report the failure to his/her supervisor and obtain a functioning device as soon as reasonably practicable. Uniformed members should wear the BWC in a conspicuous manner or otherwise notify persons that they are being recorded, whenever reasonably practicable. Placement of the BWC shall be done in such a manner that the camera is not obstructed by clothing nor equipment.

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Any member assigned to a non-uniformed position may carry an approved portable recorder at any time the member believes that such a device may be useful. Unless conducting a lawful recording in an authorized undercover capacity, non-uniformed members should wear the recorder in a conspicuous manner when in use or otherwise notify persons that they are being recorded, whenever reasonably practicable.

Members shall document the existence of a recording in any incident report or other official record of the contact, including any instance where the recorder malfunctioned or the member deactivated the recording. Members shall include the reason for de-activation.

422.6 ACTIVATION OF THE AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDER

This policy is not intended to describe every possible situation in which the recorder should be used, although there are many situations where its use is appropriate. Members should activate the recorder any time the member believes it would be appropriate or valuable to record an incident. The recorder shall be activated once dispatched and while en route to any call-for service.

The recorder shall be activated in any of the following situations:

- (a) All enforcement and investigative contacts including stops and field interview situations.
- (b) Traffic stops including, but not limited to, traffic violations, stranded motorist assistance and all crime interdiction stops.
- (c) Self-initiated activity in which an officer would normally notify the Main Desk.
- (d) Any other contact that becomes adversarial after the initial contact in a situation that would not otherwise require recording.

The recorder shall not be activated in any of the following situations:

- (a) Inside any medical facility including hospitals, nursing homes and doctor's offices.
- (b) In any of the NYS Unified Court System facilities including city and county courts.

Members should remain sensitive to the dignity of all individuals being recorded and exercise sound discretion to respect privacy by discontinuing recording whenever it reasonably appears to the member that such privacy may outweigh any legitimate law enforcement interest in recording. Requests by members of the public to stop recording should be considered using this same criterion. Recording should resume when privacy is no longer at issue unless the circumstances no longer fit the criteria for recording.

At no time is a member expected to jeopardize his/her safety in order to activate a portable recorder or change the recording media. However, the recorder should be activated in situations described above as soon as reasonably practicable.

422.6.1 CESSATION OF RECORDING

Once activated, the portable recorder shall remain on continuously until the member reasonably believes that his/her direct participation in the incident is complete, the situation no longer fits the

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criteria for activation and the officer has cleared the call or scene. Recording may be stopped during significant periods of inactivity such as report writing or other breaks from direct participation in the incident.

422.6.2 SURREPTITIOUS USE OF THE AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDER

New York law permits an individual to surreptitiously record any conversation in which one party to the conversation has given his/her permission. Members may surreptitiously record any conversation during the course of a criminal investigation in which the member reasonably believes that such a recording will be lawful and beneficial to the investigation.

Members shall not surreptitiously record another department member without a court order or unless lawfully authorized by the Chief of Police or the authorized designee.

422.6.3 EXPLOSIVE DEVICE

Many portable recorders, including body-worn cameras and audio/video transmitters, emit radio waves that could trigger an explosive device. Therefore, these devices should not be used where an explosive device may be present.

422.7 PROHIBITED USE OF PORTABLE RECORDERS

Members are prohibited from using department-issued portable recorders and recording media for personal use and are prohibited from making personal copies of recordings created while on-duty or while acting in an official capacity.

Members are also prohibited from retaining recordings of activities or information obtained while on-duty, whether the recording was created with department-issued or personally owned recorders. Members shall not duplicate or distribute such recordings, except for authorized legitimate department business purposes. All such recordings shall be retained at the Department.

Members are prohibited from using personally owned recording devices while on-duty without the express consent of the Shift Sergeant/Shift Supervisor. Any member who uses a personally owned recorder for department-related activities shall comply with the provisions of this policy, including retention and release requirements, and should notify the on-duty supervisor of such use as soon as reasonably practicable.

Recordings shall not be used by any member for the purpose of embarrassment, harassment or ridicule.

422.8 IDENTIFICATION AND PRESERVATION OF RECORDINGS

To assist with identifying and preserving data and recordings, members shall download, tag or mark these in accordance with procedure and document the existence of the recording in any related incident report.

Any time a member reasonably believes a recorded contact may be beneficial in a non-criminal matter (e.g., a hostile contact), the member should promptly notify a supervisor of the existence of the recording.

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422.9 RETENTION OF RECORDINGS

All recordings shall be retained for a period consistent with the requirements of the established records retention schedule but in no event for a period less than 180 days.

422.9.1 RELEASE OF AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDINGS

Requests for the release of audio/video recordings shall be processed in accordance with the Records Maintenance and Release Policy.

422.10 REVIEW OF RECORDED MEDIA FILES

When preparing written reports, members should review their recordings as a resource (see the Officer-Involved Shootings and Deaths Policy for guidance in those cases). However, members shall not retain personal copies of recordings. Members shall not use the fact that a recording was made as a reason to write a less detailed incident report.

Supervisors are authorized to review relevant recordings any time they are investigating alleged misconduct or reports of meritorious conduct or whenever such recordings would be beneficial in reviewing a member's performance.

Recorded files may also be reviewed:

- (a) Upon approval by a supervisor, by any member of the Department who is participating in an official investigation, such as a personnel complaint, administrative investigation or criminal investigation.
- (b) Pursuant to lawful process or by court personnel who are otherwise authorized to review evidence in a related case.
- (c) By media personnel with permission of the Chief of Police or the authorized designee.
- (d) In compliance with a public records request, if permitted, and in accordance with the Records Maintenance and Release Policy.

All recordings should be reviewed by the Records Access Officer prior to public release (see the Records Maintenance and Release Policy). Recordings that unreasonably violate a person's privacy or sense of dignity should not be publicly released unless disclosure is required by law or order of the court (Public Officers Law § 89).