

**2021 Surveillance Impact Report Executive Overview**

# **Emergency Scene Cameras**

**Seattle Fire Department**

## Overview

**The Operational Policy statements in this document represent the only allowable uses of the equipment and data collected by this technology.**

This Executive Overview documents information about the collection, use, sharing, security and access controls for data that is gathered through Seattle Fire Department's Emergency Scene Cameras. All information provided here is contained in the body of the full Surveillance Impact Review (SIR) document but is provided in a condensed format for easier access and consideration.

### 1.0 Technology Description

Certain Seattle Fire Department (SFD) response vehicles maintain a digital camera for use during emergency operations. The make and model of emergency scene cameras differ slightly according to the unit or response vehicle. In all cases though, the cameras are used to take photographs via a basic "point and click" method.

Chiefs and Medic Units use the [Nikon Coolpix L24](#) or the [Panasonic Lumex TS30](#). The Fire Investigation Unit's [Nikon D7200](#) has more functionality, including the ability to take high quality videos. It is only used to take pictures for fire investigations.

### 2.0 Purpose

**Operational Policy: Emergency scene cameras may be utilized by Department personnel for several reasons:**

- **Providing emergency medical doctors with pictures of the mechanism of injury for trauma patients.**
- **Pictures of fire scenes for Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) investigations.**
- **Safety investigations following collisions involving Department response vehicles.**

In emergency settings, time is of the essence. A camera is a useful tool for first responders for information sharing purposes because images convey a significant amount of information in a short amount of time.

### 3.0 Data Collection and Use

**Operational Policy: The cameras are used to take photographs via a basic "point and click" method. There are strict policies regarding the use and deletion of photos if they include victims requiring emergency medical service (POG section 3004-7). Additionally, [The Uniform Health Care Information Act \(RCW 70.02\)](#) governs the use, retention and disclosure of confidential medical information, which includes photos of traumatic injuries sustained by patients.**

Digital cameras are currently in use by three divisions of the Seattle Fire Department:

- Medic One (Battalion 3) paramedic units
- Battalion Chiefs in Safety 1 and Safety 2 units
- Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) investigators and the FIU Captain

For medic units, cameras are only to be used during emergency medical responses where showing the mechanism of injury to hospital staff is required to maintain high-level continuity of care. The FIU camera may only be used for fire investigations. The Safety Office cameras can only be used by chiefs during safety investigations, such as vehicle collisions.

Chiefs may use the cameras to take photos of incident scenes for research or for use in training. Pictures are also taken during safety investigations involving Fire Department personnel, such as vehicle collisions.

## 4.0 Data Minimization & Retention

**Operational Policy:** [The Uniform Health Care Information Act \(RCW 70.02\)](#) governs the use, retention and disclosure of confidential medical information, which includes photos of traumatic injuries sustained by patients. For FIU records, investigation photos are retained in a database that is compliant with current Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) standards.

Additionally, The Seattle Fire Department's internal Policies and Operating Guidelines ("POG") establishes rules around the retention of digital photographs during emergency medical responses:

- Section 5001-13: "All Medic Units and Medic 44 carry a digital camera in the controlled drug safe. These cameras may be utilized by Department personnel to record the mechanism of injury for trauma patients. These photographs will only be shown to appropriate hospital emergency department staff to clearly explain the severity of injury and then will be promptly deleted from the camera's internal memory."
- Section 5001-2.6: "Digital photographs of mechanism of injury for trauma patients taken with the digital camera carried in Medic Unit(s) and/or M44 shall be deleted after being shown to appropriate hospital emergency department staff."
- Section 3004-7: "in accordance with OG 5001.2 Aid and Medic Responses, Digital Cameras, on-duty firefighter/paramedics may use digital cameras provided by the Department to record the mechanism of injury to trauma patients. After showing the photographs to appropriate hospital emergency department staff the photos will be deleted."

## 5.0 Access & Security

**Operational Policy:** The Medic Unit cameras can only be accessed by Battalion 3 paramedics. Per Department policy, the data is not retained following transfer of patient care.

**Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) photos are accessible only to fire investigators, the FIU Captain and one civilian administrative specialist. Fire Investigation Unit photos are stored on a CJIS-client database.**

**Safety chiefs take pictures for collision investigations, and those are accessible only to the safety office (a total of four battalion-level chiefs).**

### Access

CAD may be used to identify personnel associated with a specific unit or incident, as all on-shift SFD members are required to sign-in to CAD. Daily inventory and equipment use can be traced to the personnel on duty.

### Security

Fire Investigation photos are maintained in a CJIS-compliant database known as Digital Evidence Management Software (DEMS). Policies set forth by CJIS include:

- A limit of 5 unsuccessful login attempts by a user accessing CJIS
- Event logging various login activities, including password changes
- Weekly audit reviews
- Active account management moderation
- Session lock after 30 minutes of inactivity
- Access restriction based on physical location, job assignment, time of day, and network address

Safety office photos are stored on a secured city server within the Department's "O" drive.

## 6.0 Data Sharing and Accuracy

**Operational Policy:** Photos of trauma patients are only shared in person with emergency room staff for the purposes of providing patient care.

**Photos taken by Safety Chiefs for vehicle collision investigations may be shared with the Risk Management Division of Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) for the purposes of processing claims for damages against the City.**

**FIU photos are shared with the Seattle Police Department using a shared CJIS-compliant database known as Digital Evidence Management Software (DEMS).**

The mechanism of injury (MOI) for trauma patients can be shared much more quickly and accurately with emergency medical staff with a picture than by written or verbal communication. Time and accuracy are critical in these scenarios, so sharing photos is an invaluable tool for first responders during medical emergencies.

The Seattle Fire Department's Fire Investigation Unit works closely with the Seattle Police Department's Arson and Bomb Squad (ABS). The sharing of information and records is necessary for adequate law enforcement. The sharing of FIU photos with the SPD ABS only occurs within a CJIS-compliant framework, as the two offices share a secure database.

## **7.0 Equity Concerns**

**Operational Policy: The Seattle Fire Department is committed to equitable service delivery regardless of race, sexual orientation, income, immigration or refugee status. All individuals, including non-residents and visitors to the City will be treated with compassion, professionalism and respect by SFD personnel.**

Medical privacy is particularly relevant in the case of pictures taken during medical emergencies. Victims of criminal activity may also be identified during incident responses, whose identities should be protected in accordance with [RCW 42.56.240](#) and [RCW 70.02](#).