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Camera gun debate in D.C. heats up

Get out of the car, put your hands behind your head, okay now Smile! You're on camera!

A new bill being proposed in Washington D.C. would put pistols with video cameras attached to the barrel in the hands of Metropolitan police. The idea isn't so much to track the officers marksmanship as to gather more evidence in cases where an officer's use of force is called into question.

The bill's sponsor, City Councilman Harry Thomas Jr. (D), in referring to the rare but highly charged instances of police firing their weapons, said of the camera technology, "It would help [officers] stand some of the scrutiny that they go through."

According to the [Washington Times](#), police shootings in D.C. are currently on the rise. Last year police shot at people 31 times, more than twice the number from 2006. Having a better record of the scene could help avoid lengthy investigations and court cases, which have cost the city millions of dollars.

At the same time, the camera technology is relatively untested, and other council members question whether a \$4 million upfront expense can be justified. D.C.'s Metropolitan Police department has not issued a formal position on the camera guns yet.

D.C. isn't the first place to get interested in camera guns. According to [wcbstv.com](#), the technology is [already being tested in Orange County, New York](#), since last year. Some police departments also have experimented with cameras on their Tasers in recent years.

Legend Technologies, the maker of the PistolCam gun, is working with the police in New York, in hopes to eventually equip officers there.

The PistolCam ([pdf](#)) begins filming video and recording sound as soon as the gun is pulled out of its holster. The camera would be able to record for up to an hour with 30 frames per second, at a quality comparable to home video cameras. These mini-cameras will cost D.C. police about \$700 each and weigh approximately the size of a small 7 ounce flashlight.

Recording fiery police incidents wouldn't be the only purpose of this little gadget. [The Times Herald-Record](#) says that these mini-cams will be able to help in new training programs for cops and test accuracy. They will help speed up court processions because the footage will record much needed evidence.

In a controversial case in 2007, high school freshman DeOnte Rawlings was killed when he was caught in the middle of gunfire, shot by an off-duty police officer. The two policemen involved were cleared in the case.

Video evidence would be useful in these types of cases. Police leadership, judges, and the community at large could determine with greater clarity if cops are choosing wisely when to fire their weapon.

But only if the technology works, and doesn't get in the way of police doing their jobs. As any sports fan knows, video replay doesn't solve every controversy. Sometimes, by introducing new evidence from one vantagepoint but not all, it only makes things worse.



Uploads video directly to a new episode of "Cops!"

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