

**SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT  
PROCEDURE**

**DATE:** May 22, 2015  
**NUMBER:** 1.51  
**SUBJECT:** LICENSE PLATE RECOGNITION  
**RELATED POLICY:** N/A  
**ORIGINATING DIVISION:** OPERATIONAL SUPPORT  
**NEW PROCEDURE:**   
**PROCEDURAL CHANGE:**   
**SUPERSEDES:** NEW

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**I. PURPOSE**

This Department Procedure establishes guidelines for Department members using License Plate Recognition technology.

**II. SCOPE**

This procedure applies to all members of the Department.

**III. BACKGROUND**

License Plate Recognition (LPR) is a computer based, information gathering system that utilizes specially designed cameras to rapidly capture an image of a vehicle license plate and convert the plate characters into a text file using optical character recognition technology. The text file can then be compared against pre-existing data files. If a match is found, the LPR user is notified by an audible alert and an associated notation on the user's computer screen. Because the LPR system is programmed to check all vehicles in the same manner, they are an objective non-discriminatory public safety tool. The data obtained by LPR cameras is useful in criminal investigations.

**IV. DEFINITIONS**

3M/PIPS – Current LPR technology deployed on patrol vehicles.

Vigilant – Current LPR technology deployed on RSVP vehicles.

## V. PROCEDURES

### A. Authorized Purposes, Collection, and Use of LPR Data

LPR systems have proven to be very effective tools in combating crime. LPR operation and access to LPR data shall be for official law enforcement purpose only. The legitimate law enforcement purposes of LPR systems include the following:

1. Locating stolen, wanted, or subject of investigation vehicles.
2. Locating witnesses and victims of a violent crime.
3. Locating missing or abducted children and at risk individuals.

### B. LPR Strategies

1. LPR equipped vehicles should be deployed as frequently as possible to maximize the utilization of the system.
2. Regular operation of LPR should be considered as a force multiplying extension of an officer's regular patrol efforts to observe and detect vehicles of interest and specific wanted vehicles.
3. LPR may be legitimately used to collect data that is within public view, but should not be used to gather intelligence of First Amendment activities.
4. Reasonable suspicion or probable cause is not required for the operation of LPR equipment.
5. Use of LPR equipped cars to conduct license plate canvasses and grid searches is encouraged, particularly for major crimes or incidents as well as areas that are experiencing any type of crime series.

### C. LPR Operator Procedures

LPR informational data files are periodically updated with different data sources being refreshed at different intervals. Therefore, it is important that LPR users take into account the potential for lag time between last update and an alert provided by the LPR system on a vehicle of interest or wanted vehicle. **Any alert provided by an LPR system is to be considered informational and advisory in nature and requires further verification before action.**

When alerted that a vehicle is wanted, stolen, or of interest to law enforcement, the mobile operator should, to the fullest extent possible, take the following steps:

1. Ensure the plate was read properly and that the state of origin is consistent with the alert.
2. Confirm the alert status by either manually entering the plate via the MCT or requesting the check through dispatch.
3. Review the alert information to determine the nature of the advisory.
4. In the event that compelling circumstances are present or situational officer safety issues make it unsafe to confirm the status of the alert information prior to taking action, the operator must confirm the status of the alert information as soon as possible.
5. When action is taken on an alert vehicle, it is the responsibility of the person taking action to provide the appropriate disposition information so the system may be updated as necessary.
6. Only sworn law enforcement officers should engage in contacting occupants of stolen or wanted vehicles.

## **VI. LPR DATA STORAGE, RETENTION AND ACCESS**

- A. LPR systems have the capacity to collect and store data relevant and necessary for authorized law enforcement purpose. The San Diego Police Department does not operate its own LPR server. All data collected by San Diego Police LPR vehicles is transferred to ARJIS LPR servers.
- B. As established by the ARJIS Chief's and Sheriff Management Committee, LPR data will be retained for a period of one year from the time the LPR record was captured by the LPR device.
- C. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, all electronic images or data gathered by LPR technology are for the exclusive use of law enforcement personnel in the discharge of official duties and are not open to the public.
- D. Law enforcement officers shall not share LPR data with commercial or private entities or individuals. However, law enforcement officers may disseminate LPR data to government entities with an authorized law enforcement or public safety purpose for access to such data.

- E. Nothing in these guidelines should be interpreted as limiting the use of the electronic images or data for legitimate purposes by prosecutors or others legally permitted to receive evidence under the law.

## **VII. LPR SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

LPR System Administrators shall be sworn members assigned to Operational Support. LPR System Administrators are responsible for performing the following duties:

- A. Ensuring personnel operating LPR systems have the technical expertise and necessary clearances to access law enforcement databases and information.
- B. Updating operators of any technological, legal or other changes that affect the use of LPR systems.
- C. Controlling LPR use, data access, and sharing of data with other authorized agencies.
- D. Serving as the primary point of contact for regional LPR issues and notification of system operational changes.
- E. Developing and delivering training for LPR system use, including the initial training and any subsequent updates or revisions as necessary.