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American Fork officers' shoulder radios now have eyes

By **Sara Israelsen-Hartley**

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AMERICAN FORK — With the push of a button, simple traffic stops by police become digital video clips, and messy domestic disputes are recorded for future review.

All 33 officers in American Fork are now sporting a new piece of police technology — the VIDMIC — which looks like an average shoulder radio but includes a 5.4 mega-pixel still camera and digital video camera.

"Now what the officer sees, the camera is going to see," said American Fork Police Lt. Sam Liddiard. "It's extending the range of the video camera that used to be facing forward in a police car."

Why had no one thought of this? asked Mike Marshall, vice president of sales and co-inventor of the VIDMIC. He and his father run the police-communication tool company EHS in Spanish Fork.

Jumping on the Internet, Marshall said he was sure someone had already capitalized on their brilliant idea but couldn't find anything.

So they got their producers to throw a few twists to make the radio a camera, applied for a patent and put it on the market, where it has exploded.

"Since we've had it out, we didn't expect it to be this successful," Marshall said. He said the "indisputable witness" of video footage will prevent frivolous lawsuits against police officers and will help solve criminal cases much more quickly.

The device recently won the innovation award from the International Association of Chiefs of Police at an October gathering in Louisiana, which they see as a huge nod of approval.

Nearly 300 departments across the country, including agencies in Los Angeles and New York, are testing the shoulder camera, Marshall said, and 80 departments have already purchased it, including Kane County.

West Valley City and Ogden are testing it, and talks with the Utah County Sheriff's Office are ongoing, Marshall said.

But it was American Fork Police Department that led the way, purchasing radios for each officer.

"We've been waiting, we've been looking for something like this," Liddiard said. "Every drunk driving stop, the attorney asks you, 'Did my client really do this?' Just play it. You can see for yourself the benefit just by watching the video."

The \$700 camera has one gig of flash memory, meaning it can hold 1,000 still pictures or 3 1/2 hours of video.

And even when the visual memory is full, the radio still works, keeping officers in contact with the station.

Once they've logged all that will fit, the officer will take his or her VIDMIC to the police chief or assigned officer to download.

In American Fork, only Liddiard has the password to download video and delete it from an officer's device. Officers can look at their own footage but cannot edit or delete.

There will also be new policies, Liddiard assures, to prevent manipulation or abuse of the camera, but right now all they have is an instruction to roll tape every time they respond on a call.

The camera can also help discourage negative police behavior, though Liddiard doesn't believe that will be an issue.

"I've never had a response from our law enforcement like I have from this product," said Robby Labb. "It's revolutionary. It's been received better than anything I've ever seen."

E-mail: sisraelsen@desnews.com