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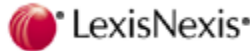
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GPS lets citizens monitor Fla. officers' speed

By Stephen Thompson
The Tampa Tribune

LARGO, Fla. — Did you ever want to know how fast a police officer was driving on a particular

Now you can find out if he works for the St. Petersburg Police Department, the Clearwater Police Department or the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office.

Last year, those agencies installed high-tech dispatch systems that record how fast an officer is driving, whether to a 911 call or on his way home in his take-home cruiser.

The information also is available to the public under most circumstances.

"If we collect it, it's a public record," police spokesman William Proffitt said.

The systems use the satellites that are part of the Global Positioning System to pinpoint a squad car's location at different points in time. With some simple arithmetic, it's not hard for a computer to figure out how fast the officer had to drive to get from one point to the other.

Many agencies, including the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, use the GPS in their dispatch systems to keep track of personnel. That way, he if they get in trouble. And dispatchers know which officer is closest to a crime when it's reported.

But the Hillsborough sheriff's office doesn't have this newfangled technology; nor does the Tarpon Springs Police Department.

Tampa soon will install its own GPS system, but it won't include any feature that can determine an officer's speed, said Jim Contento, a retired sergeant now working as a department spokesman.

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office didn't know its \$1.2 million TriTech system could keep track



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speeds until administrators were alerted to an anonymous call placed to the Clearwater Police Pinellas sheriff's Sgt. Jim Bordner said.

The call was referred to the sheriff's office because it and Clearwater police switched to the sa system in a joint endeavor, and the sheriff's office is taking the lead role, Bordner said.

Both agencies' systems went into operation in the fall. They log a deputy's longitude and latitude seconds and retain the information, said Tom Peter, the information technology manager for the office.

The anonymous caller, Bordner said, claimed to be working for some lawyer's office and asked if the new computer-aided-dispatch system could determine deputies' speeds.

"The system was so new we didn't know what its capabilities were," Bordner said.

A sample was run, and administrators found one deputy, Frank Felicetta, had driven more than 100 miles per hour on his way home, Bordner said. When confronted, Felicetta admitted to speeding. It was noted in Bordner said, but Felicetta will not be subject to an internal affairs investigation.

Analysts realized there might be occasional errors with the system, as some squad cars were caught traveling in excess of 200 mph, which is impossible, Bordner said. Bordner said such errors could occur if the system loses its link to a GPS satellite.

Though the TriTech system was not purchased to determine deputies' speeds, supervisors at the sheriff's office have been told they can access the system to do just that. And deputies have been put on notice that anyone from the public can ask for it, too.

In a memorandum to dispatch users on Dec. 21, Dan Wiggins, the director of support services at the sheriff's office, addressed to the agency's legal obligations in the matter:

"While the new CAD was not purchased with records retention as a requirement, we need to insure that all the GPS and AVL [automatic vehicle locator] information will be retained for 3 years and is available to supervisors or via public records requests."

Wiggins told The Tampa Tribune this week that the agency intends to cut the period to three months.

The St. Petersburg Police Department, whose \$4.5 million Intergraph system was put into action in January, also understands that its database of officers' speeds is public record, Proffitt said. St. Petersburg will retain the information for at least three months.

It will be accessed only if a citizen complains about an officer's speeds, if some other issue involving an officer's location comes up or if speed is a factor in a traffic-related incident. Unlike their counterparts in the sheriff's office, police department supervisors cannot access the system merely to see how fast officers are driving, Proffitt said.

"We didn't spend \$4.5 million just so we could spy on officers," Proffitt said.

Once the word gets out that the information is public, Proffitt said, defense lawyers looking to call an officer's credibility into question can ask for the data in the hope of finding the officer who broke the law by speeding.

"It could be a nightmare," Proffitt said.

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