13-04 - Use of Personal Communication Devices

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department
NEWSLETTER
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USE OF PERSONAL COMMUNICATION DEVICES

(CELLULAR PHONES)

As technology progresses, new devices are created which can do many things. The new smart phones such as the iPhone and Android can be used as a phone, computer, camera (still and video), recorder, scanner, GPS and more. While these devices may make our lives better and more convenient, they are not always a good tool for law enforcement to use while on the job.

When field units use their personal cellular phones to coordinate field units to a call, SCC and/or the station personnel will not know what is going on, specifically who is where during the coordination. This is not only dangerous for those citizens involved in the call but also for the deputies involved. In addition, using personal cellular phones to update each other regarding a call puts everyone involved in jeopardy.

Taking pictures, videos, or recording a statement on your cellular phone also puts a deputy at risk. The following is a worst case scenario, but it could happen. A deputy takes a picture with his or her cellular phone and submits it as evidence in a case. The defense attorney subpoenas the deputy's cellular phone records (which he is entitled to do). The deputy must turn over all of his or her records associated to that cellular phone which would include all personal phone numbers, pictures, texts, et cetera. All of this information will be turned over to the defense team. Now think of this - what if the defense attorney was an inmate who was representing himself? Not only is your personal information but now your family's information is in the hands of that inmate.

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 3-01/100.46, Use of Personal Communication Devices, was implemented to restrict personnel from using their personal devices to do police work. An exception to this rule is extenuating circumstances such as the Crown fire in the Palmdale area. The communication repeater was burned and destroyed. Palmdale Station's only source of communication with field personnel was through personal cellular phones. Another exception to this is a personal device that is used specifically for law enforcement work (i.e., a personal digital camera that is exclusively used for taking pictures for evidence or a recorder used specifically to record traffic stops or public contacts). This policy does not prohibit

personnel from using their personal cell phone to call their unit or receive calls from their unit for personal reasons such as calling in sick and scheduling training or overtime or other such issues.

Deputy personnel should always think of the safety of their family, themselves, and the public when making decisions to use personal communication devices.

Information regarding the content of this newsletter may be directed to Field Operations Support Services.