Surveillance Impact Report

Tactical Custom Armored Track Loader (TAC-CAT) Rescue Vehicle
San Diego Police Department

DESCRIPTION

The Tactical Custom Armored Track Loader (TAC-CAT) is a compact, rugged, tracked robotic platform designed to provide immediate situational awareness in high-risk or confined environments. Engineered with a low-profile chassis and durable construction, the TAC-CAT can be safely deployed into areas that are too dangerous, too small, or too unstable for personnel.

The platform is equipped with front-mounted LED lighting, dual-track propulsion, and a wide-angle camera system capable of operating in both illuminated and low-light conditions.

The TAC-CAT transmits real-time video to a handheld controller, enabling operators to identify threats, locate individuals, assess unknown spaces, and gather situational intelligence while maintaining a safe standoff distance. Its tracked design allows reliable movement across uneven surfaces, debris, and cluttered interiors.

PURPOSE

The TAC-CAT enhances officer and public safety during critical incidents by providing real-time visual reconnaissance through an officer-operated or remotely operated ground-based vehicle to provide tactical situational awareness.

This capability allows officers to evaluate potentially dangerous spaces before entry, reducing risk to operators, community members, and suspects. Primary uses include:

1. To provide ballistic and environmental protection for SWAT personnel and civilians during rescues, barricaded suspects, active shooters, terrorist attacks, or other critical incident operations conducted in hazardous environments.

2. To enhance officer and public safety during high-risk incidents by providing a man-operated or remotely operated armored platform capable of breaching barriers, deploying chemical agents, and delivering real-time visual observation to support tactical decision-making.

LOCATION

The TAC-CAT may be deployed anywhere the San Diego Police Department SWAT team is requested by an incident commander to support a mission.

Operations may occur in:

- Residences or apartments
- Commercial or industrial buildings
- Any environment deemed unsafe for an officer to enter

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IMPACT

The TAC-CAT is only deployed after SWAT has been called to a location for a specific mission. During all operations, operators are trained to make every effort to capture only visual imagery related to the law enforcement event or intended target of observation. This protects the privacy and property of uninvolved individuals.

The San Diego Police Department's TAC-CAT Surveillance Use Policy incorporates safeguards to protect civil liberties and civil rights. During all operations, the TAC-CAT operator is trained to make every effort to only capture visual imagery relevant to the law enforcement contact or operational target to protect the privacy of uninvolved persons and property. All deployments strictly prohibit discriminatory or viewpoint-based use. The technology is intended solely to enhance public safety, minimize risk, and support the communities of San Diego while reducing potential impacts on civil rights and civil liberties.

MITIGATIONS

The following procedures and safeguards are required prior to each deployment of the TAC-CAT:

- Requests for TAC-CAT support may be initiated by any personnel involved in responding to a specific incident or event with a defined operational objective.
- A SWAT supervisor must evaluate and approve each request prior to deployment. Supervisors are specially trained to assess compliance with SDPD's authorized uses for this equipment.
- Only trained and authorized SWAT personnel may operate the TAC-CAT.

The TAC-CAT is deployed only with prior approval, and only for specific high-risk incidents with a clearly defined objective. Throughout operations, the operator is trained to limit video capture to the intended subject of observation to safeguard the privacy of uninvolved persons.

DATA TYPES AND SOURCES

The TAC-CAT provides live video in both visible light and infrared ("IR," "Night Vision," or "Low-Light") modes and transmits this imagery to the operator's display. The system can also record video and capture still images using an internal hard drive located inside the unit.

The TAC-CAT is not equipped with a microphone and cannot hear or record audio.

The TAC-CAT is deployed only with prior approval for specific, high-risk operations with a defined objective.

DATA SECURITY

Recorded video and photographs are stored on an internal hard drive within the TAC-CAT. When necessary, data can be securely downloaded and impounded following standard Department evidence procedures to ensure integrity and chain of custody.

FISCAL COST

The TAC-CAT will be funded by private donated funds at a cost of $365,000.

Estimated annual maintenance costs depend on usage hours. The SWAT unit is expected to fall into the Low-Use category. The city will be responsible for the annual maintenance of the TAC-CAT.

Estimated annual maintenance:

- Low-Use (<500 hours): $4,000–$8,000
- Moderate-Use (500–1,000 hours): $8,000–$15,000
- High-Use (1,000+ hours): $15,000–$25,000

THIRD PARTY DEPENDENCE

The TAC-CAT does not rely on any third-party data storage or cloud services. All recorded data is stored locally on an internal hard drive accessible only to authorized SDPD SWAT personnel.

ALTERNATIVES

Compared to traditional armored and protected-response vehicles, the TAC-CAT provides a more maneuverable and purpose-built option for modern law enforcement operations. Bear Cats and similar armored vehicles offer excellent protection but are large, heavy, and restricted in tight environments such as dense neighborhoods, small rural properties, or confined interior spaces. Up-armored SUVs and pickups offer improved mobility but lack the durability, ballistic protection, and mission-specific design required for high-risk operations. Surplus Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected “MRAPs” vehicles provide strong armor but carry high maintenance costs and are too bulky for most local law enforcement scenarios.

The TAC-CAT fills the operational gap by combining high-level protection, mobility, and modular configuration in a compact, agile platform. It allows tactical teams to safely approach threats, navigate difficult terrain, deploy equipment quickly, and operate closer to danger while maintaining greater control. This makes the TAC-CAT a highly adaptable asset for a wide range of high-risk incidents faced by modern agencies.

TRACK RECORD

Armored and protected-response vehicles have a long and proven history in law enforcement operations, consistently enhancing officer and civilian safety. These platforms have reduced casualties in incidents involving armed suspects, barricaded subjects, hostage situations, and active shooters by providing ballistic protection and secure mobility for tactical teams.

They enable officers to approach volatile scenes more safely, rescue and evacuate injured individuals, provide medical aid under fire, and establish controlled perimeters that help de-escalate dangerous

situations. These vehicles function as defensive tools—serving as mobile shields that increase survivability and reduce the need for higher levels of force. Over decades, armored platforms have repeatedly allowed for safer resolutions to critical incidents and strengthened agencies' ability to protect their communities.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMENTS

The notice for this community meeting was publicly posted on November 26, 2025, and shared on the Police Department's social media platforms to inform the community about the upcoming community meeting at The Anchor Church (Council District 4) on December 4, 2025 at 1500 hours. SDPD Community Relations Officers distributed the information, and it was also provided to all council districts.

On December 4, 2025, at 1500 hours, there was a publicly held community meeting in all nine council districts in the City of San Diego. The following surveillance technology was presented by the San Diego Police Department:

1. SWAT Tactical Custom Armored Track Loader (TAC-CAT) Rescue Vehicle

There were zero attendees in District 1. There were zero attendees in District 2. There was one (1) attendee in District 3. There were two attendees in District 4. There were zero attendees in District 5. There were zero attendees in District 6. There were zero attendees in District 7. There were zero attendees in District 8. There were zero attendees in District 9. There were no comments or questions from the three attendees. There were no comments submitted to the online public comment form.

To maximize public accessibility, the Police Department created a link on the City of San Diego's technology website that hosts all materials for both current and upcoming technology presentations. The materials and a public comments/questions section can be accessed at the web address provided below. The same link was posted alongside the QR code made available during the community meeting.

The video platform allows translation into over 100 languages—including Spanish and other commonly used languages throughout San Diego—ensuring that impacted community groups can fully review the material. The video is available on the San Diego Police Department's YouTube channel under https://www.youtube.com/live/1AJ58l4ho80?si=cu6-DjbUKHXQf62b.