Surveillance Impact Report

Underwater Remote Operated Vehicles
San Diego Police Department

PURPOSE

Underwater Remote Operated Vehicles (UROVs) are used for the following purposes:

1. To support first responders during critical incidents by providing real-time video imagery via remotely operated UROVs.
2. To support investigations by providing video and photographic evidence collection of crime scenes from an underwater vantage point.
3. To provide enhanced security overwatch and anti-terrorist efforts during Special Events and large gatherings with the intent to identify pre-incident indicators and mitigate terrorist and criminal acts before they happen.
4. To support recovery operations by searching for victims and evidence in the waterways.
5. To support diving operations by retrieving victims and evidence from the waterways.
6. For internal training purposes.
7. For use by the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) Media Services Unit for social media and outreach purposes

USE

The San Diego Police Harbor Unit authorized to support the following types of operations:

1. Search and Rescue support for lost, missing, missing-at-risk, stranded persons, or suspects.
2. Provide underwater observation and imagery for safety and situational awareness in support of lifeguard response and disaster response.
3. Provide photo and video digital media recordings in support of crime scene evidence collection.
4. Provide underwater and remote camera observation and imagery during incidents involving drowned victims, evidence collection underwater, and high-risk tactical operations.
5. Provide underwater imagery and photo/video support for Department training.
6. Provide enhanced safety observation during maritime events and special events.
7. Provide non-law enforcement related underwater photography and videography for the SDPD Media Services Unit in support of the Department's social media and public outreach.
8. Any other missions deemed necessary by the Chief of Police that are in the interest of Public Safety and align with the Department's Vision, Values, and Mission.

The following rules and processes are required prior to each use of a UROV:

1. All requests for UROV support must be initiated by an incident commander to support a specific incident or event with a specific support objective.

2. The Harbor Patrol Unit Lead or Northern Division 120's Lieutenant must evaluate the request and approve the UROV operation prior to deployment to support each individual incident. The Harbor Patrol Unit Lead and 120's Lieutenant are specially trained to assess the request and determine if the UROV operation will comply with the SDPD's list of authorized uses for UROVs. The Harbor Patrol Unit Lead and 120's Lieutenant are also specially trained in the use of UROVs as it relates to the protection of citizens' privacy, civil rights, and the preservation of citizens' First and Fourth Amendment rights.
3. If UROV deployment is approved, Harbor Patrol Unit Lead will make notifications to the 120s Lieutenant who supervises the Harbor Patrol Unit and to the Northern Commander.
4. Only authorized members of the Harbor Patrol Unit who are trained in the use of UROVs shall use or be in possession of Department UROV equipment.

Department procedures associated with the use of UROVs are:

- 1.49 -Usage of Body Worn Cameras
- 3.02 – Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property, Evidence and Articles Missing Identification Marks

DESCRIPTION OF EQUIPMENT

An underwater remotely operated vehicle, or UROV, is a specialized robot designed to operate beneath the surface of the water while being controlled from a ship, boat, or shore station. It is connected to its operator by a tether, which supplies power and allows real-time communication. UROVs are equipped with cameras that provide live video, along with lights so operators can see in dark underwater environments. Depending on the mission, they may also carry tools such as robotic arms, sensors, sonar, or sampling devices. UROVs are used for tasks like underwater inspections, search and recovery, marine research, environmental monitoring, and exploring areas that are too deep or dangerous for divers. They allow precise maneuvering, safe access to challenging locations, and detailed visual documentation.

A UROV is, in essence, a manually controlled video/photography camera that is attached to a small remote-controlled submarine. The majority of the data collected by a UROV is similar to a handheld "point-and-shoot" camera or a Body Worn Camera.

UROV deployed by SDPD have the following features and capabilities:

1. They are approximately 40 lbs. in weight, including all accessories.
2. They have an eight thruster design and use eight electrically motorized propellors to provide underwater maneuverability.
3. They are equipped with digital cameras capable of taking photographs and videos in the visual spectrum and stored on a USB drive.
4. They have multi-beam imaging sonar to allow the operator to see in low visibility water.
5. They have interlocking jaws to grip or grab on to an object.
6. They have an attached tethered power/data cable to support sustained use for several hours.

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DATA COLLECTION

UROV equipment does not automatically record video or take photographs. The UROV Operator manually controls when the UROV will record video or take photographs.

A UROV is in essence a manually controlled video/photography camera that is attached to a small remote-controlled underwater craft. A majority of the data collected by UROV is similar to a handheld "point-and-shoot" camera or a Body Worn Camera.

SDPD UROVs can collect video and photographs in the visual spectrum.

UROVs are deployed only to specific incidents with a specific target or specific objective. The UROV Operator manually controls the UROV camera system and activates either video or photos to be captured based on the objectives and goals of the UROV mission. During a UROV Evidence Collection Operation, the UROV Operator will manually control the UROV to take photographs or video as requested by the investigative unit that requested UROV Support.

During a law enforcement operation, or during observation of a crime or in anticipation of a crime, the UROV Operator will manually activate the video recording capability of the UROV in a similar manner to how a ground-based officer activates their Body Worn Camera during a contact. This captured video is regarded as digital media evidence (DME) and is treated as evidence throughout the remainder of the operation until the DME is properly impounded and documented by the UROV Operators assigned to the operation.

During all operations, the UROV Operator is trained to make every effort to only capture visual imagery of the law enforcement intended target of observation.

All DME in the form of photographic and video evidence that is captured from the UROV is retained on a secured digital (SD) card or on an external digital recording device attached to the UROV ground control station. These SD cards and recording devices are only authorized to be in the possession of SDPD UROV Operators who are responsible for collection and proper impounding actions. The SDPD UROV Operators assigned to the UROV Operation are also responsible for documenting this collection of evidence and the chain of custody associated with impounding the evidence.

All UROV DME is impounded in one of two ways:

1. The DME is extracted from the UROV SD card and placed onto a portable drive by UROV Operators their portable drive is physically impounded in the SDPD Property room and labeled as impounded property. The original SD card is wiped clean of data to be used again. The Harbor Patrol Unit Lead is responsible for verifying the DME was impounded properly, the chain of custody was documented, and the original SD card was wiped clean of DME.
2. The DME is extracted from the UROV SD Card and uploaded directly into the SDPD evidence.com digital evidence repository. The original SD card is then wiped clean of data to be used again. A UROV operator is responsible for verifying the DME was impounded properly, the chain of custody was documented, and the original SD card was wiped clean of DME.

DATA ACCESS

All DME is retained within the physical UROV console until the SD card is removed from the UROV console. Only Harbor Patrol Unit Officers may be in possession of the UROV and thus in possession of UROV collected DME until it is extracted from the SD card and impounded either physically or digitally.

Once the DME has been impounded physically or electronically, retention, access, possession, and copying of such evidence is controlled and regulated by SDPD Procedure 3.02 – Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property, Evidence and Articles Missing Identification Marks and SDPD Procedure 1.49 – AXON Body Worn Cameras.

Only sworn SDPD police officers may become a UROV Operator. All SDPD UROV Operators must be approved by the Harbor Patrol Unit Lead and the 120's Lieutenant who supervises the Harbor Patrol Unit. All SDPD UROV Operators receive specialized training on the proper handling, possession, and impounding of DME recovered by UROVs.

DATA PROTECTION

All DME is retained within the physical UROV console until the SD card is removed from the UROV console and is therefore not accessible to anyone remotely.

Once DME has been impounded physically or electronically, data protection becomes the responsibility of the Property Unit or the evidence.com system and all such evidence is controlled and regulated by SDPD Procedure 3.02 – Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property, Evidence and Articles Missing Identification Marks and SDPD Procedure 1.49 – AXON Body Worn Cameras.

DATA RETENTION

Once DME has been impounded physically or electronically, evidence retention is the responsibility of the SDPD Property Unit or the evidence.com system and all such evidence is controlled and regulated by SDPD Procedure 3.02 – Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property, Evidence and Articles Missing Identification Marks and SDPD Procedure 1.49 – AXON Body Worn Cameras.

Retention timeframes depend on the nature of the incident and any related investigative or prosecutorial requirements, and in accordance with state law.

PUBLIC ACCESS

UROV-collected DME can only be accessed by the SDPD UROV Operator prior to evidence impound. Once UROV collected DME is impounded by UROV Personnel into the SDPD Property Room or evidence.com digital repository, access to this DME is controlled and regulated by SDPD Procedure 3.02 – Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property, Evidence and Articles Missing Identification Marks and SDPD Procedure 1.49 – AXON Body Worn Cameras.

THIRD PARTY DATA SHARING

UROV operators do not share UROV-collected DME with third-party vendors. All UROV collected DME is impounded either physically in the SDPD Property Room or digitally into evidence.com. The UROV unit only shares collected DME with the San Diego City Attorney or the San Diego District Attorney in connection with legal proceedings, or in response to a valid court or judicial order.

TRAINING

Only SDPD UROV Operators are authorized to use any of the SDPD UROVs.

SDPD UROV Operators must complete the following:

1. Successfully set up and break down the UROV system independently.
2. Search an area and retrieve an object from the bottom of Mission Bay and bring it to the surface.
3. Quarterly UROV training.

AUDITING AND OVERSIGHT

The Harbor Patrol Unit Lead and 120s Lieutenant are the primary oversight and approvers of each UROV Operation, which includes the UROV Flight(s), data collection, evidence impounding, and documentation by the UROV Operators and support staff.

The Harbor Patrol Unit Lead and 120s Lieutenant oversees UROV operations and provide additional oversight and auditing of all UROV Operations which includes the UROV operations, data collection, evidence impounding, and documentation by the UROV Operators and support staff for every single operation. The Harbor Patrol Unit Lead and 120s Lieutenant are responsible for ensuring all actions by UROV Operator comply with the Surveillance Use Policy as well as quarterly audits of UROV usage.

Once UROV collected DME is impounded by UROV Operator into the SDPD Property Room or evidence.com digital repository, access to this DME is controlled and regulated by SDPD Procedure 3.02 – Impound, Release, and Disposal of Property, Evidence and Articles Missing Identification Marks and SDPD Procedure 1.49 – AXON Body Worn Cameras.

MAINTENANCE

SDPD UROV equipment is inspected, and maintenance is performed on a monthly schedule to ensure the safe and functional operating condition of the equipment prior to deployment. This inspection also ensures the security and integrity of the surveillance technology and the information collected.

SDPD UROV equipment is additionally inspected prior to every operation to ensure it is in proper working condition.

All UROV maintenance and inspections are conducted by UROV Operators who receive specialized training on the specific UROV they are inspecting and maintaining.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMENTS

On July 22, 2026, at 1500 hours, there was a publicly held meeting in all nine council districts in the City of San Diego. The Community Data Sharing technology was presented by the San Diego Police Department during the meeting.

There were three attendees in District 1. There were zero attendees in District 2. There were zero attendees in District 3. There were thirteen attendees in District 4. There were two attendees in District 5. There were zero attendees in District 6. There were four attendees in District 7. There were zero attendees in District 8. There was one attendee in District 9.

There was a total of 12 comments and questions out of the 23 attendees.
See Attachment A of all comments and questions submitted during the meeting.

Additionally, there were 153 comments submitted to an online public comment form:

- Surveillance Technology Feedback Form For the June 22, 2026 Community Meeting – Results

See Attachment B for all comments submitted online.

The meeting was video recorded and can be viewed at:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUmQerbqkk0

The following comments and questions specific to UROV technology were posed by the public during the meeting:

Comment #7:

In reference to the underwater remote operated vehicles, how much marine environment damage is that going to cost when the military already has caused so much of it? The other thing is the disciplinary procedures. What are those going to be like? Paid leave for the officers that misuse them? How is it not going to be used against marginalized people when black San Diegans are already nine times more likely to be charged with resisting an officer, according to a KPBS report. And seven times more likely to face force by San Diego Police Department. How is that not going to be happening to our marginalized communities?

Response: The UROVs operate only during search or recovery missions. They can secure a target or, if the item is light enough, lift it to the surface. When used as intended, UROVs do not pose any threat to the marine environment.

Comment #12:

I was really wanting to get an answer to an earlier question regarding smart glasses especially but smart glasses, drones, underwater remote operated vehicles tools. Who are the manufacturers and who is tasked

and paid to interpret and analyze all of the massive amounts of data acquired from these including the ALPR cameras.

Our city spends an exorbitant amount of money at the expense of citizens who are now paying to visit Baloa Park and other public places experiencing increased parking costs throughout the city. I have no confidence that the data acquired is not limited to legal police activity. We now know that police can access our social security numbers.

Response: The UROV is a Sarbot unit, and its manufacturer does not collect or retain any operational data. The only data captured by the UROV consists of videos or photographs initiated solely by the operator. This data is transmitted through the tether to the control computer and stored on its hard drive. All collected data is then removed from the hard drive and impounded in accordance with Department Policy 3.02.

The following comments specific to UROV technology were submitted online:

Entry #22:

These tools themselves aren't really the main concern from me. New tools will continue to be developed and avoiding them all together isn't a reality.
However, I have 0 trust in the private companies creating and selling these tools and I have 0 trust in the SDPD and related government organizations will safe guard and be respectful of the data collected by these tools.
There is already mountains of evidence of mis-use, either intentionally or unintentionally, of the data from these automated systems, and this is a small scale deployment.

If trust is at all a concern for SDPD, increases surveillance and automation of data collection is NOT the path to rebuilding that trust.

Response: The UROVs operate only during search or recovery missions and training. The UROV are not used for surveillance purposes. It does not detect or collect any personal individual information and does not violate the 4th Amendment.

Entry #36:

While new technologies offer exciting possibilities, we must carefully consider their potential impact on privacy, civil liberties, and democratic values. Several emerging technologies raise significant concerns that warrant careful scrutiny and robust public debate:

Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) Data: The widespread deployment of ALPR technology raises serious concerns about mass surveillance and the erosion of individual privacy. The constant tracking of individuals' movements creates a chilling effect on freedom of movement and association.

Underwater Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs): The deployment of ROVs in our waterways raises serious questions about surveillance and data ownership. Unregulated access to

underwater environments could lead to privacy violations and potential misuse of sensitive information.

Smart Glasses: While smart glasses hold potential benefits, their ability to constantly capture visual data presents a significant threat to personal privacy. Who owns this footage, how is it stored and protected, and under what circumstances can it be accessed? Clear guidelines and regulations are crucial to prevent misuse and protect individual autonomy.

Drone as First Responder (DFR): While drones could offer valuable assistance in emergency situations, their use by law enforcement agencies necessitates careful consideration. Lack of transparency and accountability in drone deployment could lead to unwarranted surveillance and escalation of situations, potentially violating civil liberties.

Response: The UROVs operate only during search or recovery missions and training. The UROV are not used for surveillance purposes. It does not detect or collect any personal individual information and does not violate the 4th Amendment. The UROV is a Sarbot unit, and its manufacturer (Hybrid Robotics) does not collect or retain any operational data. The only data captured by the UROV consists of videos or photographs initiated solely by the operator. This data is transmitted through the tether to the control computer and stored on its hard drive. All collected data is then removed from the hard drive and impounded in accordance with Department Policy 3.02.

There were numerous comments submitted online that were not specific to UROV technology but were in reference to all of the technologies presented. All of these comments can be found in Appendix B. These comments focused on a few general topics to include the funding sources, violations of privacy and the 4th amendment, user access and abuse. Below are the UROV responses to address of those comments in mass:

Funding Response: The UROVs were funded through a federal grant.

Privacy and 4th amendment Violation Response: The UROVs operate only during search or recovery missions and training. The UROV are not used for surveillance purposes. It does not detect or collect any personal individual information and does not violate the 4th Amendment. The UROV is a Sarbot unit, and its manufacturer (Hybrid Robotics) does not collect or retain any operational data.

The only data captured by the UROV consists of videos or photographs initiated solely by the operator. This data is transmitted through the tether to the control computer and stored on its hard drive. All collected data is then removed from the hard drive and impounded in accordance with Department Policy 3.02.

User Access and Abuse Response: Only a limited number of Officers have access to and be authorized to use UROV equipment. UROV equipment is unable to target specific individuals or groups.