

Minnesota company's gun-mounted cameras could help capture police shootings.

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When a police officer draws a weapon, every second is crucial. Maple Plain-based Viridian Weapon Technologies wants to make sure that every second is captured.

Viridian has been making automatic laser and light attachments for guns since 2011, but the recent scrutiny of police shootings, nationally and locally, prompted the company to develop a camera attachment for guns that could be used by police departments.

The company calls the product INSTANT-ON, and it works just like it sounds: as soon as the weapon leaves the holster, INSTANT-ON automatically activates the camera, which Viridian calls FACT (Fast Access Camera Technology) Duty. The camera records video and audio as soon as the gun is drawn.

"We wanted to apply the INSTANT-ON technology to a camera for law enforcement," said Viridian founder and President Brian Hedeem. "As those [shootings] kept happening in different cities... in Charlotte and Houston... and Minneapolis, too, we thought 'boy, this is something that's really needed by the public and by law enforcement.'"

This technology could have been helpful during the recent trial of Jeronimo Yanez, who shot and killed Philando Castile during a traffic stop last July. Just weeks after Yanez was acquitted, Justine Damond was fatally shot by officer Mohamed Noor. In both cases body camera footage was unavailable – Yanez wasn't wearing a camera and Noor didn't activate his before the shooting.

"We see this as a win-win [for the community and the officers]. It's creating transparency in the community. It's going to show what really happened, it's going to show the view from the muzzle of the gun," Viridian General Counsel Matt Plowman said.

The cameras are designed to fit standard issue holsters. The FACT Duty also produces far less data than traditional body and dash cameras, making the footage easier for police departments to store and retain footage.

Viridian has received strong interest from individual gun owners, but has focused on marketing the product to police departments because "that's where the biggest need is for the public," Hedeem said.

The company has scheduled testing and evaluation sessions with a number of police departments locally, nationally and in Europe, but did not disclose which. Minneapolis police Lt. Gregory Reinhardt said that the department hadn't heard of the technology and was not considering it or anything similar. The department currently uses Axon body cameras, and Reinhardt cited equipment compatibility and storage concerns as reasons not to switch.

Viridian said it hopes law enforcement will adopt the cameras because, unlike body cameras that are activated at the discretion of the officer, they capture footage of high pressure situations immediately.

"Think about it as mandatory recording of every use of force incident — every time the gun is out," Hedeem said.



The FACT Duty camera by Viridian Weapon Technologies, pictured above, can be outfitted to fit standard issue police department weapons and holsters.