

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT REFORM STUDY COMMITTEE

Notes from a demonstration of the Chicago Police Department's interrogation taping system

Site Visit: Chicago Police Department, Belmont and Western Avenues
February 7, 2007, 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Committee members in attendance: Richard Schwind (Co-Chair), Randy Stone, Jeff Howard, Chip Coldren

Others in attendance: Steven Hein (research assistant to Chip Coldren)

Representing the Chicago Police Department: Michael Chasen, Deputy Chief, Detective Division; Sergeant Tim Gilbert

The visit began with a brief historical summary from Deputy Chief Chasen. He explained that Superintendent Terry Hillard began planning for an interrogation recording system in 2002, when the likelihood of legislation mandating such taping was on the horizon. When the law mandating recording of homicide interrogations went into effect in July 2005, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) had a 'state-of-the' art system ready. Chasen explained that prior to the implementation of this system, there was no such system at CPD; this is a totally new system; it is not a modification of some earlier system. Chasen described the CPD recording system as 'unique in the world.' The RMS corporation developed it according to CPD's specifications. It cost approximately \$2.9 million to develop, plus an additional \$1.1 million for training (the initially training was delivered to 673 detectives); so he estimates the cost to implement the system at around \$4 million. He explained that groups representing countries from around the world (South Korea, England, France, Australia, Canada, Germany) and from around the country have come to CPD to view the system, and several of them have plans to implement the system.

Currently, CPD has a total of 37 rooms equipped for recording interrogations (6 rooms in the Belmont and Western location) – in the five detective areas, plus at the Homan Square Cold Case unit, and in the Polygraph unit.

CPD provides continuous training for new detectives. The training lasts approximately 2 days, is provided by Chasen and other CPD officials. It covers the technology plus policies and revised procedures in both the detective and patrol divisions.

Other local police departments do not 'borrow' the CPD system, though occasionally CPD will have someone in custody who is wanted by another jurisdiction; in such instances the interrogation rooms may be used to question individuals involved in non-CPD cases. This Illinois State Police may use an interrogation room occasionally for an aggravated DUI interrogation. The Cook County Sheriff's police do not use the CPD interrogation recording rooms. Chasen looked up statistics as recent as the morning of this visit, and said that approximately 3% of the recorded videos are related to vehicular cases so some lesser percentage of those would be state police cases.

Quoting from his statistics, Chasen explained that since July 18, 2005, CPD has recorded 1,841 videos, accounting for a total of 17,411 hours (that's approximately 9.5 hours per taping). One terabyte of storage will hold 13,000 to 14,000 hours of taping files. They began the system with one terabyte of storage with a one terabyte backup, and have now gone to three terabytes of storage with three terabyte backups. [recalling our earlier conversation with Chasen last year, I believe one terabyte of storage costs about \$500,000; if this is true, they have gone from \$1 million to \$6 million in storage costs in less than 2 years]. Chasen estimated over \$10,000,000 in storage costs.

Chasen noted that, since the videos are evidence in homicide cases, the records must be retained forever.

Procedurally, all viable homicide suspects are taken to the appropriate detective areas, turned over to homicide detectives, and then taken directly to a taping room. The detective will unlock the metal box (about 1.5 foot square) right outside the door to the interrogation room, and a red light will turn on immediately, signifying that the room is in use and recording is in progress. Once turned on, the taping will run continuously, with a few exceptions – if a lawyer arrives to speak to the suspect, the sound and video link to the screen in the box outside the room is turned off with the “lawyer key” (but the taping continues with just a time counter running), the detective hands the key to the lawyer entering the room, when the lawyer is done and exits the room he or she returns the key to the detective, who keys the audio and video link back on); also, if for any reason the detective stops the taping, then a video file (with a “V” number) is created; if the detective restarts the taping, a new video file with a new “V” number is created; all “V” numbers are linked to CPD RD (Record Division) numbers. Detectives rarely stop a taping session. When the video room is in use and the recording system is running, the only way anyone outside the room can hear what is being said inside the room is by using earphones that can be plugged into a jack in the box outside the interrogation room. Thus, people not connected to the investigation who are walking in the hallways can see what is happening in the room, but they cannot hear the conversation unless they plug earphones into the jack (see description of the video room below).

If for any reason, the lights are turned off in the interrogation room, or if the lighting fails, an ultraviolet recording procedure kicks in; even though the room is pitch black inside, the camera can record what is happening inside the room with reasonable image quality (the ultraviolet recording image in the video room is of higher quality than the image in the box outside the interrogation room). This capacity was demonstrated to us.

Chasen explained that CPD does not record lineups on video; they do take photos of lineups. He explained that it is illegal to record the conversations of fillers in lineups, so they don't do it.

Following the tour and demonstration of the interrogation rooms, Chasen and Gilbert took us to the video room; this is a room near the interrogation rooms with six monitors (each one linked separately to an interrogation room, with a dedicated line, for security purposes), and with several data storage devices. Essentially it is a room that allows others to view what is happening in the interrogation rooms (provided they have a legitimate reason to do so), and to

make copies of any portion of a recorded interrogation if they want to. Chasen explained that every recording is sent to storage in a split signal. This means that one signal (feed) goes to the local storage unit, which can hold up to about 14 days' worth of interrogations; this unit works like a "TIVO" [did I get that right?], meaning the person operating it can view earlier parts of a recording while the interrogation is on-going; they can also view several different interrogations at once (if there are multiple suspects, for example). The second signal goes to a storage unit directly downtown at CPD headquarters; this is not viewable at the location, though it can be accessed at the downtown location by others. Once a recording is stopped (e.g., the recording device is turned off), the entire recording is sent downtown, with a "V" # attached to it.

Chasen showed us a portable video unit that detectives use when they have to conduct interrogations away from CPD; this unit allows the uploading of video files into the CPD video storage system.

Generally, only Assistant State's Attorney's assigned to a case, detectives assigned to a case, or a detective supervisor can gain access to the video room (obviously, other ranking police officials can). Assistant State's Attorneys receive training on the video system too.

Chasen and Gilbert explained that detectives are trained to integrate the reasons for suspect absences from the interrogation room (e.g., phone call, using the toilet, lineup) into their interrogations. If a suspect leaves the room to make a phone call, for example, the detective will ask, upon the suspect's return to the interrogation room, "How did the phone call go?" or "Did you get in touch with your mom?", or something along those lines.

Committee representatives asked Chasen and Gilbert several questions about whether detectives were changing their interrogation techniques. Sometimes yes and sometimes no, they responded. It depends on several factors (experience, individual preferences, nature of the case or suspect, etc.). The training covers the legal issues regarding legal interrogation tactics. It also depends on the state's attorney trying the case, on jury reaction, and so on. Yes, they agreed that some interrogation tactics are changing; however, it is too early to tell whether recording of interrogations is making a significant impact on trials and case outcomes. They explained that the cases involving recordings under this new system are just getting into the trial courts, so it will still be a while before any such assessments can be made. Detectives still use 'traditional' interrogation tactics.

Chasen explained several approaches to training and system planning that he felt were valuable. In developing the system, they asked detective supervisors in the different areas to identify their 'best' detectives. This group helped develop a list of all the features, and checks and balances, that the new system should have. They also utilized a series of 'what if' scenarios (with Assistant State's Attorneys playing the role of suspects) to identify problems, legal exposures, and training topics.

Richard Schwind asked if it seems that suspects are more likely to confess under this new system. In response, Chasen and Gilbert said that gang members will more readily request a lawyer (and clam up).

The system also has the capability to store and play back video recordings of homicide crime scenes, which can be helpful in the investigation process.

As the visit concluded, the Committee members present voiced their positive impressions of the interrogation recording system, the impressive record of over 1,800 recorded interrogations without the loss of a single one due to technical malfunctions, and the forethought and planning that went into the design of the system.