# *The Washington Post*, 2022 March, By [Danielle Abril](https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/danielle-abril/?itid=ai_top_abrild)

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oral sessions with C. Hamard

# Drones, robots, license plate readers: Police grapple with community concerns as they turn to tech for their jobs

Last year, police in Mountain View, Calif., knew they had a potentially dangerous situation on their hands when a man barricaded himself inside an unlocked three-story townhouse along with the homeowners. Officers on the ground used the drone to live stream video from the second- and third-floor windows. They quickly learned the man did not have any visible weapons on him. The situation ended peacefully.

Police across the United States are increasingly relying on emerging technologies to make their jobs more efficient. In their daily work, they are using drones, license plate readers, body cameras and gunshot detection systems to reduce injury and bodily harm. The move comes as some law enforcement agencies are struggling with retention and hiring during the pandemic. Police are also grappling with growing concerns about privacy that these technologies bring and potential complications they could create for officers on the job. But “as with anything else, we have to balance the line of privacy and meeting the expectation to promote public safety,” said Sgt. James Smallwood, member of the national Fraternal Order of Police.

[…] DJI[[1]](#footnote-1)’s North American spokesman Adam Lisberg said. Drones are proving to be a police force multiplier across the nation, aiding with everything from lost children to dangerous suspects to crash reconstruction. But Lisberg doesn’t think they’ll ever replace police officers. You need a sense of humanity at work in policing,” he said. “A drone is a tool that helps accomplish the goals [police] already have. [To] do it better, safely and more efficiently.” In terms of privacy, Lisberg says DJI advises departments to be upfront with thecommunity on how and when the tech will and won’t be used.

And in some cases, tech that police adopt has the ability to integrate with personal technology that residents own. Through Axon’s Citizen app, officers can send a resident a link to upload their own video or pictures, which then get tagged with the case number. Similarly, some departments have turned to Coplogic, incident-reporting software. Coplogic allows community members to submit their own crime reports for minor incidents, which helps free up police officers’ time. It helps officers “streamline the process” of creating incident reports. “We have to do the same amount of work with less bodies,” he said. “So obviously the integration of technology has the potential to enhance that.”

Chief of Houston’s police union noted that tech also can increase stress levels for officers. Body cameras, for example, can help police and the community better understand the details around an incident. “We know that there will be more tech coming,” he said. “But we pray it’s something that will help [officers] and not make it to where they have to be perfect every minute of every day.”

Police also have to walk a fine line when it comes to implementing new technology, taking into account the community’s comfort level and privacy concerns, they say. (504 words)

1. DJI is a Chinese Tech company which most American police departments buy the drones to through an American supplier. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)