



TAPING & TRANSCRIBING INTERVIEWS *in administrative investigations*



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I'm asked frequently whether you need to tape record and transcribe all interviews conducted during administrative or Internal Affairs investigations. The simple answer is yes to taping and maybe on the on transcription. Those agreements between the U.S. Department of Justice and local police agencies which address administrative investigations require that all interviews be not only taped, but also transcribed. But that isn't the common protocol in most police agencies.

First let's take the issue of tape recording these interviews. You should tape record all interviews conducted during administrative investigations. Today that really isn't a burden with the availability of digital tape recorders. These have gotten down under \$100 with a capacity of over 20 hours and can be divided into different folders without much effort. The data then can be downloaded to any computer for retention. No more tapes, storage, and reuse. *Of course, you still have to assure that your battery is charged!*

There are many reasons to tape record all interviews. Our employees have been the most significant element in mandating this aspect. They want to be assured that what they said is what is reflected in the investigative report. On the other side of the investigation, citizens who make complaints expect that we will record the interview since that has become so commonplace in our society today. Another value in tape recording is that it allows supervisors the opportunity to evaluate the performance of the investigators. It readily demonstrates the proficiency and professionalism of your investigators.

Now when should you transcribe these interviews? Transcribing interviews should be done whenever the issue being investigated has a good potential to end up in a civil lawsuit. This would be any critical incident administrative investigation or when the citizen's complaint involves police action resulting in injury to the citizen. These have that higher potential to end up in court. The other type of investigation warranting transcription of the interview is anytime your investigation results in discipline invoking significant suspension, demotion or termination. These are likely to end up in some form of external appeal. In some jurisdictions there is either a contract, Civil Service, or State mandate for

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transcription of these types of employee actions. Even when the interview is transcribed, it is important for the supervisor to still randomly compare the tape recording to the transcription. Statistically this won't be much of a burden on your agency as this usually represents less than 20 percent of your administrative investigations.

There are many methods for transcribing interviews. It is not cost effective to have verbatim transcripts done by investigators or clerical personnel. Your agency needs to look to a professional court reporting service. With the use of digital recorders these interviews can be transmitted directly to the reporting service via the internet. These services normally can give you a turnaround of just a few days and price the service out at about two hours transcription for each hour of interview. With most administrative interviews consuming between 20 to 40 minutes, that's not much of a burden.

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