



# **THERMOGRAPHIC CAMERAS: IMPACT AND USE POLICY**

**UPDATED: FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

**SUMMARY OF CHANGES BETWEEN DRAFT & FINAL POLICY**

<b>Update</b>	<b>Description of Update</b>
Removed statement that thermographic cameras do not use artificial intelligence and machine learning.	Public comment highlighted a lack of industry-standard definitions for artificial intelligence and machine learning.
Expanded upon thermographic cameras rules of use.	Added language clarifying thermographic cameras rules of use.
Expanded upon thermographic cameras safeguards and security measures.	Added language regarding information security. Added language to reflect removal of access to the technology when job duties no longer require access.
Minor grammar changes.	Minor syntax edits were made.

**THERMOGRAPHIC CAMERAS ADDENDUM**

<b>Date of Addendum</b>	<b>Description of Addendum</b>
April 11, 2023	NYPD is utilizing an autonomous security robot during a six-month pilot program that is capable of transmitting infrared thermal images.

**THERMOGRAPHIC CAMERAS REVISION**

<b>Date of Revision</b>	<b>Description of Revision</b>
February 4, 2026	This impact and use policy was revised to comply with the recently passed amendment to the POST Act, Local Law 56 of 2025.

## **ABSTRACT**

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Thermographic cameras are used by law enforcement personnel to create images and videos using thermal light, i.e. heat, as opposed to traditional cameras that use visible light. These specialized cameras enhance visibility during operations such as securing large-scale events, search and rescue, hostage negotiation, barricaded individuals, and other operations conducted in low-visibility environments. The New York City Police Department (“NYPD”) uses thermographic cameras to enhance NYPD operations by providing real-time observation of the live or residual heat signature of a person or object.

The NYPD produced this impact and use policy because thermographic cameras have the ability to process thermal data of both people and objects, and share a heat signature image, video, or temperature data (“thermographic data”) with NYPD investigators.

## **CAPABILITIES OF THE TECHNOLOGY**

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The NYPD utilizes two types of thermographic cameras:

1. Thermal Imaging Cameras; and
2. Infrared Cameras.

All objects, both organic and inorganic, omit infrared light. Infrared light is a type of electromagnetic radiation invisible to the human eye, but it can be felt by humans as heat. Both thermal imaging cameras and infrared cameras measure temperature by capturing different wave frequencies of infrared light being omitted from an object. The cameras process the differences in the measured infrared light, and create a heat signature image or video.

Thermographic cameras allow officers to observe obscured or hazardous containing conditions preventing traditional observation such as darkness, smoke or gas. Thermographic cameras allow for rapid detection of people during a search of a large outdoor location, crime scene monitoring, within transit infrastructure, and large-scale disasters. Thermographic cameras are also used during large-scale events to detect heat signature anomalies, search and rescue, during hostage scenarios where officers cannot safely gain access to a location, and other operations conducted in low-visibility environments.

The thermographic cameras used by the NYPD are manufactured by RIX, Flir, SEEK, Tactical Electronics, and Starboard Marine. Some NYPD handheld thermographic cameras transmit heat signature video images to a monitor directly wired to the device. Others are capable of wireless transmission of heat signature video images to a remote monitor.

Thermographic cameras can only process temperature data to create heat signature images or videos. These thermographic cameras are not capable of conducting facial recognition analysis. Other than the processing of the infrared light emitted by a person or object, the devices do not contain biometric measuring capabilities.

Both the NYPD's manned<sup>1</sup> and unmanned<sup>2</sup> aircraft systems are equipped with thermographic cameras. However, the thermographic cameras on NYPD's manned and unmanned aircraft systems are integrated into a more intricate system. Those systems are each addressed in individual impact and use policies.

**RULES, PROCESSES & GUIDELINES RELATING TO USE OF THE TECHNOLOGY**

NYPD thermographic cameras must be used in a manner consistent with the requirements and protection of the Constitution of the United States, the New York State Constitution and applicable statutory authorities.

NYPD thermographic cameras may only be used for legitimate law enforcement purposes or other official business of the NYPD, and supervisory personnel responsible for oversight must authorize use. The underlying facts of each investigation are considered prior to the utilization of the technology, including the safety risks to NYPD personnel, civilians and suspects that may be involved in the operation, as well as the legitimate law enforcement purpose to utilize the technology in a given circumstance.

***Court Authorization:*** The NYPD does not seek court authorization prior to the use of thermographic cameras. The devices are strictly used during emergencies where exigent circumstances exist or to enhance observation of locations exposed to public view.

***Additional Guidelines:*** If an NYPD investigation involving political activity requires the use of thermographic cameras, the Intelligence Division will use it in compliance with Department policies. The Intelligence Division is the sole entity in the NYPD that may conduct investigations involving political activity pursuant to the Revised *Handschu* Guidelines

As with all NYPD operations, no person will be the subject of police action because of actual or perceived race, color, religion or creed, age, national origin, alienage, citizenship status, gender (including gender identity), sexual orientation, disability, marital status, partnership status, military status or political affiliation or beliefs.

The misuse of thermographic cameras will subject employees to administrative and potentially criminal penalties.

***Addendum Obligation:*** In accordance with the Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology Act, an addendum to this impact and use policy will be prepared as necessary to describe any additional uses of thermographic cameras.

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on the NYPD's manned aircraft systems, please refer to the manned aircraft systems impact and use policy.

<sup>2</sup> For additional information on the NYPD's unmanned aircraft systems, please refer to the unmanned aircraft systems impact and use policy.

### **SAFEGUARDS & SECURITY MEASURES AGAINST UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS**

***Physical Safeguards & Security Measures:*** Thermographic cameras are securely stored in NYPD facilities when not in use, in a location that is inaccessible to the public. A supervisor must periodically inspect and account for the equipment. Access to NYPD thermographic cameras is limited to NYPD personnel with an articulable need to use the technology in furtherance of a lawful duty. Access is determined by an officer's assignment and is rescinded when that officer's assignment no longer requires its use.

***Data Safeguards & Security Measures:*** NYPD thermographic cameras capable of wireless remote viewing transmit thermal images and associated data to a remote monitor over an encrypted signal. NYPD handheld thermographic cameras transmit processed images to a monitor through a direct wired connection.

Unauthorized access of any system will subject employees to administrative and potentially criminal penalties.

### **POLICIES & PROCEDURES RELATING TO RETENTION, ACCESS & USE OF THE DATA**

Thermographic data may only be used for legitimate law enforcement purposes or other official business of the NYPD, including in furtherance of criminal investigations, civil litigations, and disciplinary proceedings. Some NYPD thermographic cameras do not record, store or retain thermographic data, and are used just as live feeds. Other thermographic cameras retain the thermographic data locally, either on the device itself or within a memory card inserted into the device. Once the memory of the thermographic camera reaches maximum capacity, the thermographic camera cannot create new images until the memory is cleared.

Relevant thermographic data may be downloaded and retained in the appropriate NYPD computer or case management system. NYPD personnel utilizing computer and case management systems are authenticated by username and password. Access to computer and case management is limited to personnel who have an articulable need to access the system in furtherance of lawful duty. Access rights within NYPD case management and computer systems are further limited based on lawful duty.

The NYPD retains and disposes of records pursuant to New York City Charter § 1133(f), (g) and (h). Pursuant to these provisions, the NYPD developed a retention schedule that was approved by the New York City Law Department and Department of Records and Information Services. This retention schedule governs the retention and disposition of NYPD records, and the NYPD retains and disposes of records pursuant to this schedule. The retention period of a "case investigation record" depends on its classification and is based on the final disposition of the case, i.e., what the arrestee is convicted of or pleads to. Further, case investigations are not considered closed unless they result in: prosecution and appeals are exhausted, a settlement, no arrest, or when restitution is no longer sought.

The misuse of any data will subject employees to administrative and potentially criminal penalties.

## **POLICIES & PROCEDURES RELATING TO PUBLIC ACCESS OR USE OF THE DATA**

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Members of the public may request information related to the NYPD's use of thermographic cameras pursuant to the New York State Freedom of Information Law. The NYPD will review and evaluate such requests in accordance with applicable provisions of the law and NYPD policy.

### **EXTERNAL ENTITIES**

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Entities outside of the NYPD do not have direct access to the information and data collected by NYPD's thermographic cameras.

Other law enforcement agencies may request thermographic data contained in NYPD computer or case management systems in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and New York City and NYPD policies. Additionally, the NYPD may provide thermographic data or information related to it to partnering law enforcement and city agencies pursuant to on-going criminal investigations, civil litigation, and disciplinary proceedings. Information is not shared in furtherance of immigration enforcement.

Following the laws of the State and City of New York, as well as NYPD policy, information may be provided to community leaders, civic organizations and the news media in order to further an investigation, create awareness of an unusual incident, or address a community concern.

Pursuant to NYPD policy and local law, NYPD personnel may disclose identifying information externally only if:

1. Such disclosure has been authorized in writing by the individual to whom such information pertains to, or if such individual is a minor or is otherwise not legally competent, by such individual's parent or legal guardian and has been approved in writing by the Agency Privacy Officer assigned to the Legal Bureau;
2. Such disclosure is required by law and has been approved in writing by the Agency Privacy Officer assigned to the Legal Bureau;
3. Such disclosure furthers the purpose or mission of the NYPD and has been approved in writing by the Agency Privacy Officer assigned to the Legal Bureau;
4. Such disclosure has been pre-approved as in the best interests of the City by the City Chief Privacy Officer;
5. Such disclosure has been designated as routine by the Agency Privacy Officer assigned to the Legal Bureau;
6. Such disclosure is in connection with an investigation of a crime that has been committed or credible information about an attempted or impending crime;
7. Such disclosure is in connection with an open investigation by a City agency concerning the welfare of a minor or an individual who is otherwise not legally competent.

**Vendors & Contractors:** The NYPD purchases thermographic cameras and associated equipment or software from approved vendors. The NYPD emphasizes the importance of and engages with vendors and contractors to maintain the confidentiality, availability, and integrity of NYPD technology systems.

Vendors and contractors may have access to associated software in the performance of contractual duties to the NYPD. Such duties are typically technical or proprietary in nature (e.g., maintenance or failure mitigation). In providing vendors and contractors access to equipment and computer systems, the NYPD follows the principle of least privilege. Vendors and contractors are only allowed access on a “need to know basis” to fulfill contractual obligations and/or agreements.

Vendors and contractors providing equipment and services to the NYPD undergo vendor responsibility determination and integrity reviews. Vendors and contractors providing sensitive equipment and services to the NYPD also undergo background checks.

Vendors and contractors are legally obligated by contracts and/or agreements to maintain the confidentiality of NYPD data and information. Vendors and contractors are subject to criminal and civil penalties for unauthorized use or disclosure of NYPD data or information.

If usage data is disclosed in a manner violating the local Identifying Information Law, the NYPD Agency Privacy Officer, upon becoming aware, must report the disclosure to the NYC Chief Privacy Officer within 24 hours. The NYPD must make reasonable efforts to notify individuals affected by the disclosure in writing when there is potential risk of harm to the individual, when the NYPD determines in consultation with the NYC Chief Privacy Officer and the Law Department that notification should occur, or when legally required to do so by law or regulation. In accordance with the Identifying Information Law, the NYC Chief Privacy Officer submits a quarterly report containing an anonymized compilation or summary of such disclosures by City agencies, including those reported by the NYPD, to the Speaker of the Council and makes the report publicly available online.

## **TRAINING**

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NYPD personnel using thermographic cameras receive command-level training on the operation of thermographic cameras and associated equipment. Officers must operate thermographic cameras in compliance with NYPD policies and training.

## **INTERNAL AUDIT & OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS**

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The NYPD’s use of thermographic cameras is determined by supervisory personnel responsible for the conduct of a given operation. Supervisors of personnel utilizing thermographic cameras are responsible for security and proper utilization of the technology and associated equipment.

All members of the NYPD, including those utilizing thermographic cameras, are advised that all NYPD equipment is intended for the purposes of conducting official business. Use of NYPD equipment for personal or non-NYPD business matters is strictly prohibited and individuals who are found in violation of this policy are notified that they will be subject to disciplinary action. Reports of unauthorized use of equipment may be made to the Internal Affairs Bureau.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY REPORTING**

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There are no known tests or reports regarding the health and safety effects of thermographic cameras. Additionally, after a search for relevant information, no physical safety hazards

identifiable by manufacturer warnings or published academic research regarding physical safety hazards have been identified pertaining to the use of thermographic cameras or associated equipment.

### **DISPARATE IMPACTS OF THE TECHNOLOGY & IMPACT & USE POLICY**

The NYPD has implemented significant safeguards to ensure that thermographic cameras are used effectively and responsibly. The NYPD does not believe that this technology is being used in a manner that disparately impacts any protected groups as defined in the New York City Human Rights Law.

The safeguards and audit protocols built into this impact and use policy for thermographic cameras mitigate the risk of partial and biased law enforcement. Thermographic cameras only process the infrared light being omitted by any person or object into heat signature video. Thermographic cameras do not use facial recognition technologies. Access is restricted to authorized personnel. Other than the processing of the infrared light emitted by a person or object, the devices do not contain biometric measuring capabilities. Based on these safeguards, any theoretical risks of thermographic cameras are effectively mitigated and do not result in disparate impacts.

The NYPD is committed to the impartial enforcement of the law and to the protection of constitutional rights. The NYPD prohibits the use of racial and bias-based profiling in law enforcement actions, which must be based on standards required by the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, Sections 11 and 12 of Article I of the New York State Constitution, Section 14-151 of the New York City Administrative Code, and other applicable laws.

Race, color, ethnicity, or national origin may not be used as a motivating factor for initiating police enforcement action. Should an officer initiate enforcement action against a person, motivated even in part by a person's actual or perceived race, color, ethnicity, or national origin, that enforcement action violates NYPD policy unless the officer's decision is based on a specific and reliable suspect description that includes not only race, age, and gender, but other identifying characteristics or information.