

**RIGHTS OF ONLOOKERS**

This order establishes policies regarding when persons are permitted to remain as onlookers, their right to overhear conversations between the officer and suspect, and their right to act as a witness.

**I. POLICY**

**A. WITNESSING STOPS, DETENTIONS, ARRESTS.** It is the policy of this Department that persons not involved in an incident be allowed to remain in the immediate vicinity to witness stops, detentions and arrests of suspects occurring in public areas, except under the following circumstances:

1. When the safety of the officer or the suspect is jeopardized.
2. When persons interfere or violate law.
3. When persons threaten by words or action, or attempt to incite others to violate the law.

**B. OVERHEARING CONVERSATION.** If the conditions at the scene are peaceful and sufficiently quiet, and the officer has stabilized the situation, persons shall be allowed to approach close enough to overhear the conversation between the suspect and the officer, except when:

1. The suspect objects to persons overhearing the conversation.
2. There is a specific and articulable need for confidential conversation for the purpose of police interrogation.

**C. INQUIRIES**

1. Persons shall be permitted to make a short, direct inquiry as to the suspect's name and whether the officer or the suspect wishes a witness. The suspect shall be allowed to respond to the inquiry.
2. If a citizen is a witness to the activity for which the suspect was detained or arrested, the officer may request his/her name; however, the citizen is not compelled to disclose such information.

**D. BYSTANDER FILMING OF OFFICER-SUSPECT CONTACTS.** It is increasingly common for bystanders, who are not involved in any criminal activity, to record contacts between officers and citizens, during which officers are detaining, citing or arresting a suspect or engaging in crowd control at a demonstration. Bystanders have the right to record police officer enforcement activities by camera, video recorder, or other means (except under certain narrow circumstances as set forth in Sections A and B above).

1. An officer shall not seize, compel or otherwise coerce production of these bystander recordings by any means without first obtaining a warrant. Without a warrant, an officer may only request, in a non-coercive manner, that a bystander voluntarily provide the film or other recording. These requests should be made only if the officer has probable cause to believe that a recording has captured evidence of a crime and that the evidence will be important to prosecution of that crime. If a bystander refuses to voluntarily provide the recording, an officer may request the person's identity as provided in Section C, 2., above.
2. If a bystander voluntarily provides his or her recording and/or equipment, the officer shall provide the bystander with a receipt (SFPD 315). The receipt shall contain a written statement verifying that the recording and/or equipment has been voluntarily provided to the Department and shall be signed by the bystander.

**E. VIOLATIONS/COMPLIANCE.** As an alternative to arresting an onlooker who is in violation of Penal Code Section 148 or other related offenses (e.g., 647 c P.C., 22 Municipal Police Code) officers may order onlookers to "move on"; however, the person shall not be ordered to move any farther distance than is necessary to end a violation (see DGO 5.03, Investigative Detentions and DGO 6.11, Obstruction of Streets and Sidewalks). Persons who believe that an officer did not comply with the provisions of this order shall be referred to an appropriate supervisor or to the Office of Citizen Complaints.

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**References**

DGO 5.03, Investigative Detentions  
DGO 6.02, Physical Evidence  
DGO 6.11, Obstruction of Streets and Sidewalks  
DGO 6.15, Property Processing