



Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual

Sheriff Carl Ritchie

13-08

Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR)

- ☐ NEW
- ☐ REVISED
- ☒ REVIEWED

ACA Standards Reference:
CALEA Standards Reference: 41.3.9
NCCHC Standards Reference:
SCLEA Standards Reference:
SC Minimum Standards:

This policy dated 1/29/2025 replaces prior policies cited above and supersedes all previously issued directives.

I. Purpose:

To establish guidelines for the implementation, installation, and use of mobile and stationary Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) and the data the system collects.

II. Policy:

The use of ALPR technology is intended as a tool for law enforcement to identify stolen license plates, stolen vehicles or vehicles identified as having a specific interest to law enforcement. It is the policy of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) to use APLR technology for law enforcement functions that will detect criminal activity and promote the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Charleston County. This technology shall be used in a manner consistent with legal and constitutional limitations, privacy concerns and the highest ethical standards.

III. Definitions:

A. For purposes of this procedure, the word "deputy" applies to all agency employees with a certification classification of Class I, Class II, Class III, or Reserve Deputy, as defined by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.

The following terms are used interchangeably; however, they carry guidance to specific employees based on usage of the term:

1. Deputy, deputies, deputy sheriff, detention deputy, sworn employee, uniformed sworn employee, sworn administrative employee, and
2. civilian, non-sworn employee.

B. *Employee*: When used without further clarification, the term employee is inclusive of all agency members (sworn and non-sworn).

C. *Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR)*: Equipment consisting of fixed and mobile cameras and computer hardware/software used to automatically recognize and interpret the characters on vehicle license plates. This data is then compared against "Hot Lists" of license plates bearing some significance to law enforcement.

D. *Hot List*: A list of license plate numbers of stolen cars, stolen tags, suspended tags, AMBER alerts and vehicles owned by persons of interest in a crime. Hot list information can come from a variety of sources, including the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles (SCDMV). In addition, an agency can create their own hotlist by manually adding license plate information to the agency created hot list

in order to be alerted if and when a vehicle license plate of interest is read by the ALPR system.

- E. *Hit:* A read matched to a plate that has previously been registered on any “hot list” of vehicle plates related to stolen vehicles, wanted vehicles, suspended tags, or other factors supporting investigation, or which were manually registered by a user for further investigation.
- F. *Alert:* A visual and/or auditory notice of a “hit” that is triggered when the ALPR system reads a license plate that is a match with information found on any hotlist.
- G. *Read/Scan:* Digital images of license plates and vehicles associated with metadata (i.e., date, time, and geographical coordinates associated with the vehicle capture) that are captured by the ALPR.
- H. *Digital Image:* Image produced of the license plate and the vehicle with each scan.
- I. *Verification:* the user of the digital image system will complete visual verification of each hit.
- J. *Confirmation:* Each hit will be confirmed through NCIC, NLETS, SCMDV or any in-house database prior to any deputy sheriff initiating an investigation and/or traffic stop.

IV. Procedure

- A. Sworn personnel will adhere to the following procedures when utilizing ALPR. It applies to use by personnel throughout the agency regardless of assignment. (Ref: CALEA 41.3.9 item a)
 - 1. All operators shall receive training prior to using the ALPR system. Training will be administered by qualified CCSO Information Technology Services (ITS) staff, Terminal Agency Coordinator (TAC), Traffic Services personnel or vendor representatives. All users must obtain NCIC certification before operating ALPR. (Ref: CALEA 41.3.9 item c)
 - 2. Mobile scanners are installed on selected vehicles. The ALPR scanners are expected to read license plates at 90-95% accuracy. The system should function in a variety of weather, light, and road conditions. The ALPR equipment passively reads the registration and/or license plates of moving or parked vehicles and compares them against “Hot Lists” containing records from NCIC and/or other files. The “Hot

Lists" database is regularly updated with the most current wanted vehicle information from NCIC and/or other files. There is no direct connection between the ALPR and NCIC. Manual additions to "Hot Lists" can be made by the ALPR Program Administrator or Traffic Services. During operation, plate matches are indicated by an audible and visual alarm. In addition to verification of the plate number and state, the deputy sheriff and/or dispatcher is responsible for verifying the status of the warrant or stolen vehicle NCIC entry before the suspect vehicle is stopped.

3. It is the responsibility of each ALPR user to ensure that the current "hot list" from the SCDMV and NCIC are updated prior to the deployment of the ALPR equipment.
4. Upon receiving an alert, the ALPR operator should utilize whatever information is available to determine the accuracy of the "hit." The ALPR operator will visually verify the particular tag and the actual read on the ALPR screen are the same (i.e., from the same State, etc.). The operator will confirm the "hit" is still active by running the information through NCIC/SDMV via Mobile Data Terminal or through the Charleston County Consolidated 9-1-1 Center (911 Center). Receipt of an ALPR alert is NOT sufficient probable cause to warrant an arrest without additional verification.
5. Upon receipt of an alert, the ALPR operator will use established procedures in taking enforcement action based on the seriousness of the offense.
6. Users with administrator privileges may enter additional information into the ALPR system. The reason for the entry shall be included in the "note" portion of the entry screen (e.g., stolen vehicle, missing person, abduction, Amber Alert, robbery suspect, etc.). If a note is used for special attention factor, provide a deputy sheriff's name and contact number that will be available 24-hours a day. Providing only the 911 Center number may delay obtaining crucial information.
7. Upon completing the manual entry, the operator should query the ALPR data to determine if the license plate was scanned previously.

B. Deployment:

1. ALPR equipped vehicles may be used in a routine patrol capacity or for special operations. They should NOT, however be intentionally used in a manner or location that will increase the risk of damage to ALPR equipment, such as civil disturbance situations.

2. The ALPR system will be checked by the ALPR operator/deputy sheriff at the beginning of each shift.
3. The deputy sheriff must ensure the equipment is functioning properly throughout their shift. The system should indicate a number of plates that were checked. If there are no plates indicated, the system is not functioning properly. If the system shows that plates are being scanned, the system is properly working. If there are any problems or issues with any of the equipment, they will be reported immediately to Information Technology Services (ITS) staff.
4. An ALPR "hit" is not to be used as reasonable suspicion or probable cause for a traffic stop or enforcement contact. Contact with the vehicle and its occupants is only to be made after the "hit" is confirmed through NCIC or SCDMV.
5. Operation of ALPR equipped vehicles shall be in accordance with the agency's policies regarding the operation of law enforcement vehicles.
6. Supervisors should make every effort to deploy ALPR equipped vehicles on a regular basis. (Ref: CALEA 41.3.9 item a)

C. Data Retention, Access and Dissemination:

1. ALPR equipment has the capability to store and/or cause to store data collected during the license plate detection and identification phase of use. ALPR generated data will be stored in the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) database for law enforcement purposes. The Charleston County Sheriff's Office has entered into an agreement with SLED to have access to these files via the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles (SCDMV), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). SLED will maintain data and images submitted for a period of three years, after which the data and corresponding images (if applicable) will be removed from the server. This will be in compliance with the SC Information and Intelligence Center Privacy, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties Protection. (Ref: CALEA 41.3.9 item d)
2. The agency Terminal Agency Coordinator (TAC) will be responsible for management of user accounts. Authorized users are limited to current employees who are legally authorized to view ALPR data for crime prevention and detection purposes.

3. APLR information and networking resources are to be used solely for law enforcement purposes only and consistent with applicable laws. Authorized users shall not use or share information for any unethical, illegal, or criminal purpose. Under no circumstances will personnel share ALPR data with any non-law enforcement agency. Any requests for ALPR information from a non-law enforcement agency will be forwarded to the Public Information Officer (PIO).
(Ref: CALEA 41.3.9 item b)
4. User accounts with access to APLR privileges must have a unique password from all other accounts held by that user.
5. All passwords are to be treated as sensitive, confidential CCSO information. Personnel are prohibited from sharing CCSO passwords with anyone, including co-workers.

D. Maintenance:

1. Under no conditions should an ALPR operator attempt to modify the ALPR equipment or software operating system without permission from the TAC or Information Technology Services (ITS) Manager.
2. ALPR camera lenses may be cleaned with glass cleaner or mild soap and water and a soft, nonabrasive cloth.
3. ALPR cameras must first be removed from the vehicle prior to entering an automatic car washing facility.
4. Damage to ALPR equipment shall be immediately reported to a supervisor and ITS staff. The supervisor shall document and investigate, if necessary, the damage in accordance with established policies on agency owned equipment ([Policy 2-12 Agency-Owned Property](#)).
5. The ITS supervisor for the agency shall be notified of any ALPR equipment needing maintenance or repair. The ITS supervisor will coordinate all maintenance and repair with the appropriate ALPR vendor. The vehicle does not need to be removed from service once the damaged or malfunctioning ALPR is secured or removed from the vehicle.
6. Anytime the ALPR unit is disconnected, un-mounted or removed from the vehicle, it shall be placed in the protective storage case and secured to prevent further damage.