



UNION COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE

STANDARD OPERATING
PROCEDURE

NUMBER: **§334**

EDDIE CATHEY, SHERIFF

SUBJECT: License Plate Readers

REVISED: 04/16/2026

RESCINDS: 03/17/2026

APPROVED:

DATE: 4/20/2026

§ 334 LICENSE PLATE READERS

I. PURPOSE

To provide guidance for the capture, storage, and use of digital data obtained through the use of Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) technology in accordance with (N.C.G.S. §20-183.31).

II. POLICY

To provide guidelines for the implementation, training, responsibilities, and use of fixed ALPR technology and equipment to scan, detect, and identify license plate numbers. The ALPR technology shall be restricted to legitimate law enforcement uses for the purpose of furthering law enforcement goals and enhancing public safety.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Alert: An audible and/or visual signal activated upon the read of a license plate by the ALPR system that has not been visually verified by an officer against the photo in the ALPR system. An alert is not a conclusive confirmation. Additional investigation is always required when the system issues an alert.
- B. Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) System: Equipment consisting of camera(s), computer, computer software, and associated peripherals, used to automatically scan, recognize, and interpret the characters on vehicle license plates. Digital images captured by the cameras are converted into data, which is processed through and stored by the system. The system can compare the

data when captured against hot lists of license plates and alert the ALPR Operator to an offense or relevant intelligence on the vehicle, which may help provide the basis for a reasonable suspicion stop to allow for further investigation. Additionally, stored system data can be queried and analyzed for investigative purposes.

- C. Fixed ALPR: ALPR cameras that are permanently or temporarily affixed to a structure, such as a pole, a traffic barrier, or bridge.
- D. Hit: A read matched to a plate that has previously been registered on an agency's "hot list" of vehicle plates related to stolen vehicles, wanted vehicles, or other factors supporting investigation, or which has been manually registered by a user for further investigation.
- E. Hot Lists: A database populated with items of specific interest to investigative and/or enforcement operations of law enforcement. This may include, but is not limited to, Terrorist Watch list data, stolen/wanted vehicles and registration plates, wanted and missing persons, caution notifications and registration plates associated with Amber Alerts or various watch lists provided for law enforcement purposes.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. ALPR ADMINISTRATOR

The Lieutenant of Criminal Investigations Bureau will act as the ALPR Administrator. The Administrator will have administrative oversight for the ALPR system deployment and operation, and is responsible for the following:

1. Designate a System Administrator under his/her command to provide training and administer the day-to-day operation of the ALPR equipment and data;
2. Manage the utilization of the ALPR software from the end user through training, reporting, storage, monitoring, and data sharing;
3. Administer and preserve ALPR data per N.C.G.S. §20-183.32;
4. Coordinate all installation and maintenance of ALPR equipment through current vendor(s);

5. Monitor the use of the ALPR system and ensure periodic audits;
6. Manage the compilation of "hot lists"; and
7. Maintain user access to ensure employees who may be ineligible to have access are eliminated from the database.

B. OPERATIONS

Use of ALPR is restricted to the purposes outlined below. Agency members shall not use or allow others to use the equipment or database records for any unauthorized purpose.

1. ALPR shall only be used for official law enforcement purposes.
2. No member of this agency, or other law enforcement agency, shall operate ALPR equipment or access ALPR data without first completing agency-approved training.
3. An ALPR may be used in conjunction with any routine patrol operation or criminal investigation. Prior to initiation of a stop based on an ALPR Alert or Hit, the user must:
 - a. Visually verify that the vehicle plate number matches the plate number run by the ALPR system, including both the alphanumeric characters of the license plate and the state of issuance; and
 - b. Verify the current status of the plate through MDT query, when circumstances allow.
 - c. If practicable, the officer should verify an ALPR response through the Division of Criminal Investigation Network (DCIN) before taking enforcement action that is based solely on an ALPR alert (N.C.G.S. § 20-183.31).
4. Receipt of a Hit notification is not sufficient probable cause to warrant an arrest.
5. Hot Lists may be updated manually for legitimate law enforcement purposes if the user enters a specific plate into the ALPR system and

wants to be alerted when that plate is located. Whenever a plate is manually entered into the ALPR, the officer shall document the reason. The license plate number shall only remain in the system for 30 days, unless a specific request, with justification, is made by the requesting operator.

The operator is responsible for removing all manually entered license plate data once the need for the entry no longer exists.

C. DATA SHARING AND DISSEMINATION

1. The ALPR systems and associated equipment and database are authorized for public safety purposes. Use of this equipment, associated databases, or data in a manner outside the scope of this policy may subject the employee to disciplinary action.
2. ALPR data shall only be shared with another law enforcement agency or prosecutor.
3. The release of ALPR data is not required if the disclosure of requested ALPR data will compromise an on-going investigation.
4. ALPR data is not a public record and shall not be disclosed except as provided in N.C.G.S. §20-183.32(e).
5. ALPR data may be shared with users of the Union County Sheriff's Office from private citizens, neighborhoods, or businesses that have purchased ALPRs, on their own, for the purposes listed in this policy. ALPR data from the Union County Sheriff's Office will not be shared with any of these entities as this information may only be shared with other law enforcement agencies or prosecutors.

D. DATA COLLECTION, RETENTION and PROCEDURES

1. The ALPR Administrator is responsible for ensuring systems and processes are in place for the proper collection and retention of ALPR data.
2. All ALPR data will be collected and securely retained by current vendor(s) in a cloud-based server. Active Union County Sheriff's Office users have access to the stored data.

3. ALPR data shall be purged after 30 days by the vendor.
4. Upon request of a law enforcement officer within this agency or an external law enforcement agency, the custodian/ALPR administrator shall take all necessary steps to immediately preserve the requested captured plate data.

E. DATA SECURITY AND ACCESS

1. All ALPR data shall be accessible only through a login/password-protected system capable of documenting all access of information by name, date, and time.
2. Members approved to access ALPR data under these guidelines are permitted to access the data for legitimate law enforcement purposes only.
3. Periodic ALPR system audits are required and will be managed through the ALPR and/or System Administrator.

F. TRAINING

ALPR access will only be issued to agency members who have completed agency approved training. Documented training shall include policy review, system use, operation and retention of the ALPR equipment, collection and retention of ALPR data within the agency, collection and retention of ALPR data outside the agency, and the security and release of ALPR data.

G. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Supervisors should appropriately monitor ALPR operators to ensure that use of the ALPR equipment and data is consistent with policy. Any use of the ALPR system that violates the restrictions contained in the policy may result in disciplinary action.

Note: This section is for internal use only. This section does not enlarge a deputy's civil or criminal liability in any way, and should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care than that otherwise required by law, with respect to third party claims. Violations of this section, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this Agency, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.



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