



OPD uses BEAST to keep track of evidence

By Dariush Shafa, Messenger-Inquirer

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The Owensboro Police Department has a new tool in the department, and while the newcomer may carry an animal name, it's an example of how a little technology can go a long way.

In the Crime Scene Unit at OPD, officers are learning a new evidence logging system called The BEAST, or Bar-coded Evidence Analysis Statistics and Tracking.

"It's a program designed to help us better track our property and inventory," said Marvin Hayden, supervisor of the Crime Scene Unit at OPD.

Using bar code labeling, handheld scanners and a computerized inventory system, the department can easily log, store and find any piece of property or evidence it has in its evidence vault.

Right now, OPD is phasing out its previous system, which relied on paper forms stapled or otherwise attached to evidence or property. Those sheets, which were filled out by hand, were tedious and time-consuming because each individual item logged would require its own sheet.

"With a meth lab bust, you can have hundreds of pieces of evidence," Hayden said. "This program will help us better tag and identify those items."

When it comes to inventory audits, The BEAST is going to be an immense help also, Hayden said. In years past, manually auditing every item and piece of evidence took a whole month. With the new bar codes and scanners and computer system, it will take about two days maximum, Hayden said, making audits that are mandatory for the department's accreditation with certain agencies much easier.

It makes ironing out any problems easier, too.

"If there is a discrepancy, it will tell us where the missing piece is at and where it's supposed to be," Hayden said. "This is going to help us correct those problems a lot faster and a lot sooner."

Hayden said from his standpoint, there's nothing wrong with the way they do things now.

"We've always done a good job," Hayden said. "This will make us more efficient in day-to-day operations."

All told, including software, scanners and other equipment, The BEAST cost OPD about \$15,000, Hayden said.



Another huge bonus is that The BEAST isn't just used in police departments. A sister system under that program is also in use with the Kentucky State Police's laboratories, making any transfers between the two seamless.

"It's going to make us more efficient and productive in submitting evidence to the lab," Hayden said. "It speeds the whole process up."

Russ Carrell, a field engineer with Porter Lee Corp., the company that makes The BEAST, explained part of the reason why departments may want to have such a system. One of the biggest reasons, he said, is it helps prevent mix-ups that can interfere with the prosecution of criminal cases because the department didn't have good records on evidence.

"It makes sure that we have continuity of that chain of custody within the department," Carrell said. "We also have a lab version of this system and whenever the evidence gets to the lab, we continue that chain of custody."

OPD makes use of it, but so does the Houston Police Department, which now implements the system at an evidence and property warehouse that spans the length of an entire city block, Carrell said.

"The system works on any scale, whether it be a small town with one evidence custodian or a large city," Carrell said.

Having The BEAST system in Owensboro is also a measure of personal pride for some at the company. Holly Smith, who works in the company's accounting department, and her husband, Tim, one of the Porter Lee Corp.'s creators, are both from Owensboro.

"It's just an honor to be able to provide that service to our hometown," Holly Smith said. "I really hope that it works out well for Owensboro and that they really like the system. That's my greatest hope."

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