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**NEWS**

**Police call polygraph testing 'garbage'; others still rely on them**

Adriana M. Chávez / El Paso Times  
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EL PASO – The El Paso Police Department has dropped the use of polygraph exams – commonly known as lie detector tests – on police officers during internal investigations because the results were considered useless.

Until several months ago, the exams were used when complaints were filed against officers.

Police Chief Greg Allen, who was appointed police chief in late March, called the exams a "piece of junk" and the president of the police union said they are "garbage."

In August, the El Paso City Council approved a new contract with the El Paso Municipal Officers Association that made it possible for an officer to request an independent polygraph examiner to administer the test, instead of one employed by the department, if the chief requests a polygraph test.



Allen

But the new administration of Chief Allen simply decided to not use them even though they are still an option.

Criminal suspects also have the option of taking a polygraph test, said police spokesman Officer Chris Mears.

The Police Department has three police officers who are certified to administer polygraph tests.

Both Allen and El Paso Municipal Police Officers Association President Robert "Bobby" Holguin said they have issues with the accuracy of polygraph tests.

"I don't like intimidating people. I don't like the threatening attitude of the machine," Allen said. "It's a good tool if you want to scare someone to tell the truth, but often the truth comes to the surface anyway."

Allen recalled

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an investigation of an officer whose polygraph results were interpreted differently by three polygraph examiners.

"One said the officer was telling the truth, another said the test was inconclusive, and another said the officer was lying," Allen said. "The polygraph has become the deciding factor when it's not supposed to be."

Former police Chief Richard Wiles said in the four years he was chief, he requested officers undergo polygraph testing about 12 times.

"There needs to be an understanding that the vast majority of those in the Police Department are good people doing the right thing, but you get people from time

to time who don't belong there," Wiles said. The polygraph "is not the cure all. It's not 100

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percent, but it helps get to the truth of the matter."

Holguin called the polygraph "a piece of garbage" and bashed its accuracy and inadmissability in state and federal courts.

"If it was an exact art, I'd be all for it, but it's not even close to an exact art," Holguin said. "If an officer's done wrong, we're all for the officer being treated accordingly. At the same time, we don't want this to affect officers who are not doing anything wrong."

The El Paso County Sheriff's Office currently uses polygraphs during internal investigations, something Wiles said he plans to continue if he wins in Tuesday's election.

However, Republican sheriff candidate George Rodriguez Stoltz said he doesn't plan to ask deputies to submit to such testing.

"I have full faith in investigators who are highly trained," Stoltz said. "Forensic evidence always outweighs the polygraph."

While the Police Department dropped the use of lie detector tests, the FBI still relies on them.

And in a unique twist, a California motorcycle gang used them recently to test prospective gang members, which included several federal undercover agents who infiltrated the group.

The FBI still counts on polygraphs in screening potential employees and for internal investigations.

"Individuals with access to certain sensitive programs or cases are polygraphed, and the polygraph is used during serious internal inquiries to resolve unexplained anomalies and ambiguities," said Bill Carter, national FBI spokesman. "From an investigative standpoint, the FBI believes the polygraph to be a reliable and valuable investigative tool, which can be used to further investigations."

Carter said the FBI doesn't exclusively rely on the polygraph, instead using it as "an aid in determining whether a person has pertinent knowledge of a particular matter under investigation or inquiry."

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