

Met Police officers to be 'microchipped' by top brass in Big Brother style tracking scheme

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Met Chief Sir Ian Blair could be among 31,000 officers to receive the new electronic tracking device

Every single Metropolitan police officer will be 'microchipped' so top brass can monitor their movements on a Big Brother style tracking scheme, it can be revealed today.

According to respected industry magazine Police Review, the plan - which affects all 31,000 serving officers in the Met, including Sir Ian Blair - is set to replace the unreliable Airwave radio system currently used to help

monitor officer's movements.

The new electronic tracking device - called the Automated Personal Location System (APLS) - means that officers will never be out of range of supervising officers.

But many serving officers fear being turned into "Robocops" - controlled by bosses who have not been out on the beat in years.

According to service providers Telent, the new technology 'will enable operators in the Service's operations centres to identify the location of each police officer' at any time they are on duty - whether overground or underground.

Although police chiefs say the new technology is about 'improving officer safety' and reacting to incidents more quickly, many rank and file believe it is just a Big Brother style system to keep tabs on them and make sure they don't 'doze off on duty'.

Some officers are concerned that the system - which will be able to pinpoint any of the 31,000 officers in the Met to within a few feet of their location - will put a complete end to community policing and leave officers purely at the beck and call of control room staff rather than reacting to members of the public on the ground.

Pete Smyth, chairman of the Met Police Federation, said: "This could be very good for officers' safety but it could also involve an element of Big Brother.

"We need to look at it very carefully."

Other officers, however, were more scathing, saying the new system - set to be implemented within the next few weeks - will turn them into 'Robocops' simply obeying instructions from above rather than using their own judgement.

One officer, working in Peckham, south London, said: "They are keeping the exact workings of the system very hush-hush at the moment - although it will be similar to the way criminals are electronically tagged. There will not be any choice about wearing one.

"We depend on our own ability and local knowledge to react to situations accordingly.

"Obviously we need the back up and information from control, but a lot of us feel that we will simply be used as machines, or robots, to do what we are told with little or no chance to put in anything ourselves."

He added: "Most of us joined up so we could apply the law and think for ourselves, but if Sarge knows where we are every second of the day it just makes it difficult."

Another officer, who did not want to be named, said: "A lot of my time is spent speaking to people in cafes, parks or just wherever I'm approached. If I feel I've got my chief breathing down my neck to make another arrest I won't feel I'm doing my job properly."

The system is one of the largest of its kind in the world, according to Telent, the company behind the technology, although neither the Met nor Telent would provide Police Review with any more information about exactly how the system will work or what sort of devices officers will wear.

Nigel Lee, a workstream manager at the Met, said: "Safety is a primary concern for all police forces.

"The area served by our force covers 620 miles and knowing the location of our officers means that not only can we provision resource more quickly, but should an officer need assistance, we can get to them even more quickly."

Forces currently have the facility to track all their officers through GPS devices on their Airwave radio headsets, but this is subject to headsets being up to date and forces buying the back office systems to accompany them, according to Airwave.

Steve Rands, health and safety head for the Met Police Federation, told Police Review: "This is so that we know where officers are. Let us say that when voice distortion or sound quality over the radio is lost, if you cannot hear where that officer telling you where he is, you can still pinpoint his exact position by global positioning system.

"If he needs help but you cannot hear him for whatever reason, APLS will say where he is."