

Toronto

Toronto police test full-body scanners that will replace some strip searches

Two models of full-body scanners being tested at Toronto police's 14 Division

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One of two full-body scanners Toronto police are testing in a six-month pilot project, in the hope that the machines will eventually replace manual strip searches. (Toronto Police Service)

Some Toronto police officers will soon be able to search subjects with a full-body scanner instead of using more traditional methods, like a strip search.

"We feel that there is some integrity that's brought back to the process, as well as some dignity for those that are being searched," said Meghan Gray, spokesperson for the Toronto Police Service.

The technology recently arrived as part of a six-month pilot project in the force's 14 Division downtown, one of the busiest in the city, according to Gray. Officers will be trained to the scanner in the coming weeks.

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Full-body scans could eventually replace some of the 20,000 strip searches Toronto police do each year, an average of 55 per day, Gray said.

The models used by police differ from the types of scanners common at many airports. Subjects hold their arms out to the side, resting on handles, rather than above their heads like in an airport security line.

Privacy concerns were addressed, police say

Toronto police have been exploring the use of body scanners for more than a year, a process that included addressing potential privacy concerns during consultations with the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the attorney general's office.

Two police watchdogs, the Special Investigations Unit and the Office of the Independent Police Review Director, were also consulted.

The machines are intended to replace some, but not all, "Level 3" searches carried out by police.

A Level 3 search includes:

- Removal of some or all of a person's clothing and a visual inspection of the body.

- Exposure of the undergarments or an area of the body normally covered by undergarments.

Meanwhile, a less invasive full-body scan relies on technology to detect and locate metallic, plastic, ceramic and biological items on or inside someone.

If a Level 3 is not satisfactory to investigators, then a Level 4 search is required. That process involves the retrieval of an object from inside a person's body and is carried out by a medical professional at a hospital.

The police service says it is testing scanning equipment from two different companies during the pilot project.

A review and recommendations will be made after the pilot project wraps up.

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