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ShotSpotter system to go live this weekend

The ShotSpotter gunshot detection system will go live in Kansas City by October 1.

Covering 3.55 square miles in the urban core, the system will provide police the opportunity to rapidly respond to gunfire while building relationships with law-abiding residents in the coverage areas.

The ShotSpotter Flex system from SST Inc. is a partnership between the Kansas City Missouri Police Department and Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA), with federal funding for the project secured by U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver. The \$720,000 grant funds five years of ShotSpotter service, equipment installation, and maintenance.

Since the press conference announcing the system on May 4, 2012, police, the KCATA and several community partners have worked together to install ShotSpotter. Within the coverage area, the system will identify the address of gunshots, the number of shots fired, the number of weapons used, and all within a few feet of the actual shots. Police are not divulging the locations of the system, but portions of the KCATA Troost Max bus line and the federally designated Green Impact Zone will be covered.

When the system detects a potential gunshot, it will alert an audio engineer at ShotSpotter, located in Newark, Calif. The engineer will listen to the sound to determine whether it was a gunshot (as opposed to a car backfiring, firework or other noise). If so, the engineer will alert KCPD dispatchers. This whole process takes about 45 to 60 seconds. Police dispatchers will have a monitor showing them a map of the location of the shots, and they will direct officers on the ground to the spot. Officers will respond with the same level of urgency as they do to any other shots-fired 911 call.

Chief of Police Darryl Forté said ShotSpotter is part of an organizational change regarding how the police department prevents and responds to violent crime. Not only will the department be able to use the shooting data collected through ShotSpotter to deploy police resources and prevent crime where it's most needed, it also will provide an opportunity for police to engage the community.

"Officers responding to these calls will contact residents in the area and tell them we are aware of recent gunfire in their neighborhood," Chief Forté said. "We hope that contacting these residents will foster awareness, cooperation, potential information and an opportunity for community engagement."

ShotSpotter is used in more than 70 other cities in the United States. SST Inc.'s studies have shown that as much as 80 percent of illegal gunfire goes unreported. Police hope the new community outreach prompted by ShotSpotter will increase reporting and citizen cooperation.

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