



Baker says he wants GPS tracking in Environmental Police vehicles



DAVID L RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Charlie Baker at a recent news conference

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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Governor Charlie Baker said Tuesday he wants the Massachusetts Environmental Police to turn on GPS tracking inside officers' vehicles, after a Boston Globe report outlined questionable payroll practices at the agency.

But the governor also threw his support behind the agency, which is led by Colonel James McGinn, a former State Police sergeant who served as Baker's personal campaign driver before Baker appointed him to head the agency in 2014.

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Baker defended one controversial pay practice at the Environmental Police and said that, by comparison, the alleged overtime theft by dozens of State Police troopers was “a far more serious issue.”

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The Globe [reported this week](#) that Environmental Police officers can take overtime assignments and off-duty details in the middle of the workday, scheduling their normal state work around more profitable side gigs.

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The agency has let the practice continue regularly despite vowing to curb it after concerns were raised, including by Baker, in the fall of 2016.

Experts said the practice is unheard of within law enforcement and could lead to a host of problems, including potential abuse.

But Baker on Tuesday said he believes the policy “makes sense.”

“There are many circumstances and situations where the split shift is appropriate — things like LNG [liquefied natural gas] tankers coming into the harbor and a whole bunch of other time-

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bound activities in which their presence is required,” Baker told reporters Tuesday.

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He said Environmental Police leaders have “done a lot of things over course of the past couple of years to clean up their act on that stuff,” while adding, “there’s always more to be done.”

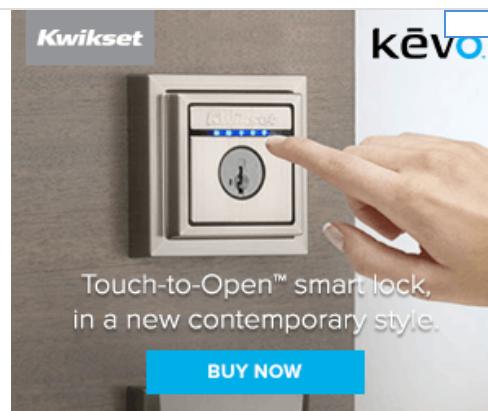
Agency officials said Tuesday they would continue to allow officers to split shifts.

The Globe this week reported how other problems that surfaced two years ago also have continued, including officers staying on the clock while traveling between regular and extra shifts and using paid time off to stretch their schedules and ensure overtime payouts.

Baker said he wanted to see one change made that could help address some of the issues.

“Turning the GPS devices on there I think is an important next step,” he said.

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State Police have enacted a series of reforms because of their payroll problems, including recently activating GPS tracking technology in cruisers to strengthen accountability.

In contrast, Environmental Police removed GPS tracking devices from their patrol vehicles three years ago at the union’s request and those tracking capabilities have not been restored.

On Tuesday, agency officials signaled the move could happen. They said they planned to continue to work with the union to get GPS tracking devices installed and running in Environmental Police vehicles to ensure both safety and efficient use of resources. The agency, which employs 83 officers on an \$11 million annual budget, enforces fishing, hunting, boating, and recreational vehicle laws.

The average base pay of the officers is about \$80,000, though about half the force earned six-figure payouts last year with overtime and private details. The highest-paid officer made \$181,300, including \$26,645 in overtime and nearly \$68,000 from details and other pay, records show.

The agency has weathered a handful of other controversies in recent years, as has the secretariat overseeing it, the Executive

Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

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