



BURLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

One North Avenue
Burlington, Vermont 05401

Michael E. Schirling
Chief of Police

Phone (802) 658-2704
Fax (802) 865-7579
TTY/TDD (802) 658-2700

Information / Press Release

Regarding the Use of Taser Electronic Control Device

Initial Release Date - July 26, 2007

Updated – November 16, 2009

Purpose

In light of ongoing inquiries regarding the use of Taser electronic control devices by law enforcement Burlington Police feel it is prudent to issue information regarding our Taser use to the Burlington community. We release this information, not in direct response to specific events, but rather to provide important and timely information for the citizens of our community.

Summary

Our initial analysis shows that we have significantly reduced injuries to officers and the number of physical confrontations with offenders by utilizing this tool.

History

After a full year of research and policy development, which included empanelling an advisory group consisting of Department members, members of the emergency medical community, physicians, and members of the Burlington Police Commission representing the public, the Burlington Police Department began using Tasers in May of 2006.

Tasers are generally used within what is called a Use of Force Continuum, which is a sliding scale of lawful force that can be used to gain compliance with legal/lawful instructions given to a person to stop a dangerous course of behavior or to effectuate an arrest. Other uses of force on the continuum include but are not limited to the use or aerosol sprays such as pepper spray or “cap stun,” the use of impact devices such as batons, hand to hand grappling, and simple verbal orders. Of course, the use of force is always a last resort if reasonable communication with unruly or combative subjects is

unsuccessful. It is important to note that, in some cases, verbal commands are immediately passed over and force deployed, depending on the threat perceived by the officer.

Since initial deployment, we have slowly grown the number of Taser Units deployed for use from 10 to approximately 60. Tasers have been unholstered and displayed in anticipation of being used 221 times. They have been fired to gain compliance with a combative or resistive subject 76 times to date. As you can see the mere display of the device often creates the desired effect of gaining compliance with lawful order by combative subjects.

Historically, we have averaged about one half dozen incidents per year in which a physical confrontation between the subject and an officer or officers escalates to a level where officers are injured and often lose time from work as a result of an assault. These losses can range from a few hours being evaluated and treated at the hospital to months of work loss injury to significant joint, orthopedic, or other injuries. Since deploying Taser, 182 weeks prior to this document's last update, the Department has not suffered injuries resulting in lost officer time to involving struggles with combative subjects during events at which a Taser was present.

As important, we have seen no incidents in which persons subjected to the deployment or firing of a Taser have been injured or suffered any lasting effects from the encounter. In short, our initial information indicates that Tasers have made the number of physical confrontations diminish and have mitigated the severity of those confrontations.

During their training, many officers are subjected to the deployment of a Taser which enhances their respect for and understanding of the effectiveness, uses, and limitations of the tool.

Ongoing Assessment

As with any new tool or method of operation, we will continue to monitor the use of these devices, their impact both locally and elsewhere, and adapt based on the needs of our community.

For Additional Information

For further information about the Taser device please visit www.taser.com.

For questions regarding this release may be directed to Deputy Chief Walter Decker at [802-540-2156](tel:802-540-2156). Anyone interested in obtaining a copy of our comprehensive Use of Force Policy should e-mail gdumas@bpdvt.org.