

## TASERS.

It is with regret that I observe our SOJP's intention to equip themselves with 'Thomas A. Swift's electric rifle' (TASER)

First of all, let us examine the claim that these weapons are a non-lethal alternative to the use of firearms, as there are several problems with this assertion:

1. the statement that they are 'non-lethal'. There are more examples on the internet than you could shake a stick at where TASERed victims have died – either from the electric shock itself, or from the results, such as banging one's head on falling.
2. the expression 'alternative' is misleading, as it infers TASERS would be used instead of firearms. TASERS have a maximum range of 30ft and are mostly used in situations where firearms would never be deployed.
3. the third assumption is that the use of a firearm is lethal. This, of course, depends entirely on whether an officer shoots to kill or merely to injure.
4. lastly, data from the USA shows that whilst the use of TASERS has increased, death by police use of firearms has not declined, giving the lie to the notion that TASER is an alternative to the use of firearms.

Secondly, the risks associated with use of Tasers:

1. The heart is a muscle controlled by electrical signal. TASERS can override this and cause cardiac arrhythmia leading to death by ventricular fibrillation.  
Note – it is voltage that kills, not amperage – you won't get a shock from a 12V, 1000A truck battery, but you can die from 240V mains (which is why building site equipment is limited to 110V). TASERS work on high voltage (1,000 – 50,000V)
2. A police officer will not know a person's medical history or possible drug use, thus entailing risk of death with virtually any suspect. Death following the use of TASER have been recorded in individuals with healthy hearts and no known medical conditions.
3. because of the belatedly recognised risk of death by TASER, it is now recommended these weapons are not aimed at the chest area. Police officers have argued that this restriction is impossible to comply with, so the risk remains.
4. there is an illusion that a TASER emits an electric shock for a second or so. The shock will last for as long as the officer activates the device, possibly several times.
5. TASERS can ignite flammable materials and therefore come with instructions not to use them where flammable liquids or fumes may be present (eg filling stations). If used on individuals who have been subjected to CS spray, there is a real possibility of setting the individual on fire (British Home Office investigation).
6. The original intention of the UK was for police to use TASER if threatened with a weapon. This has now changed and they are allowed to use the weapon pre-

emptively, even if the suspect is unarmed. It is now even being used without warning to surprise suspects before being arrested.

7. The real (and documented) possibility of mis-use: On 9 April 2008 on BBC 1, the program "Traffic Cops" showed police surprising a pedestrian by shooting him with a TASER without warning, before arresting him on suspicion of theft. The suspect had no weapon and was talking with a bystander and posed no threat, when officers leapt out of a car and tasered him. The suspect was later found to be an innocent pedestrian.

#### TASER data from the USA:

- The head of the U.S. southern regional office of Amnesty International, Jared Feuer, reported that 277 people in the United States have died after being shocked by a Taser between June 2001 and October 2007. He also noted that about 80% of those on whom a Taser was used by U.S. police were unarmed.
- On January 12, 2008, Baron Pikes died after being shocked nine times with a TASER by a police officer. Pikes was handcuffed and six of the shocks were administered within less than three minutes. His death was ruled a homicide by the medical examiner.
- April 24, 2008, USA. Kevin Piskura died after being stunned by a X-26 Taser for 10 seconds while interfering with a friend's arrest by Police in Oxford, Ohio. He was hospitalized after the confrontation and died five days later. Video and audio of the event was recorded by the X-26's mounted camera.
- In June 2008, a federal jury ordered Taser International to pay the family of Robert Heston, Jr., \$6 million in punitive and compensatory damages for the 2005 death of the man who died a day after being shocked repeatedly by officers using Tasers. According to a press report, the jury "found that Arizona-based stun-gun manufacturer Taser International should have more effectively warned police that Taser shocks were potentially dangerous."

I trust that from the above it can be seen that, especially in Jersey, the deployment of TASER is both unnecessary and unwise, representing merely a new – albeit lethal - ‘toy’ for the police to use. How often will it be abused? How many people will it kill?

A secondary concern is that it will further alienate the public from the police.

Let us not delude ourselves into thinking these weapons, if allowed, will not be abused.

One only has to recall the absurd number of police who raided Stuart Syvret’s home, when a single Centenier would have sufficed. Or the number of (unreported) raids by armed police on the homes of law-abiding people for no reason other than they happen to legally own firearms.

It is unlikely for a citizen’s life to be in danger from the police use of firearms, as guns are seldom used on the streets. Sadly, the same cannot be said for TASERS.

If in fact TASERS are issued to our police, the public may consider it necessary to take steps to protect themselves from possible death by abuse of these weapons. For example, if invited to step outside my car at a road check, I would, in the event TASERS were carried, wind up my window and drive off, even if officers were standing in my path. When one's life is at risk, one has to act accordingly.

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