

August 25, 2008

## Police fire Tasers sparingly

Metro chief says suspects succumb to avoid getting shocked

By *KATE HOWARD*  
*Staff Writer*

Metro police officers used Taser stun guns as a threat more often than they actually fired them in the first two months since they were redeployed for widespread use, according to a review of force reports.

The Metro Police Department added several checks and balances to its Taser policy in June, when more than 200 Tasers were available for officers to check out. Only those officers who completed a daylong Taser training were certified to carry the stun guns, and a specialized Taser report was required each time the Taser was turned on, regardless of whether it was fired.

And last week, Metro police added cameras and audio recording devices to its Tasers.

"Any tool we can use to draw compliance in the one of 100 people who resist arrest, there is a value to protect the people," said Metro Police Chief Ronal Serpas. "In this case, we continue to see a trend toward compliance that gives us continued reason to use this tool."

In April and May, when Tasers were available only to supervisors, the devices were fired twice. In June and July, after they were redeployed to officers, they were fired eight times, and showed to suspects resisting arrest an additional 14 times, according to police statistics.

Serpas said the number of times officers pulled out Tasers but didn't need to use them demonstrates that even showing the tool increases compliance.

Only 1 percent of arrests require officers to use force in the first place, Serpas said. Overall, Tasers were used 17 percent of the time in arrests where some kind of force was used.

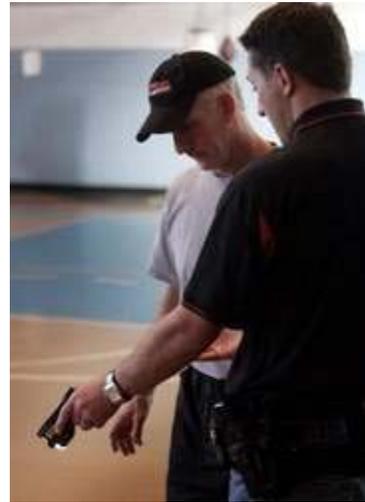
The most common types of force — takedown moves and wrestling with suspects — have declined slightly since Tasers were made available.

### Death leads to lawsuit

Taser use among Metro officers has not caused any concern in recent months, said local attorney David Raybin.

"I think people are used to the fact the officers might use the Tasers, and I think that's why you're having more compliance through the threat of the Taser than actually using it," Raybin said.

If anything, Raybin said, the extra controls and training added by Metro police highlight the need for better training in surrounding counties.



*Metro Police Taser instructor Bob Allen, left, watches an officer during Taser training at the Metro Police Academy Training gymnasium in 2005.*

While local controversy may have settled, Tasers have been criticized internationally in recent years for deaths that occurred after use. According to Amnesty International, at least 290 people in the U.S. and Canada have died since 2001 after being shocked with a police Taser.

## **Policies increase safety**

Policies like the ones Metro have put into place make it more likely that the Tasers will be used safely, said Neil Boyd, a criminologist who specializes in violent crime and has monitored Taser use by police internationally.

"When Tasers first arrived, they were deployed and the consequences were maybe not thought through," said Boyd, a professor at Simon Fraser University in Canada.

"Now, in light of a better understanding on how they work, the police, the public and politicians are all rethinking the appropriate framework.

"It's quite clear to me they do have a place in law enforcement.

"We're just trying to figure out in a precise way where that place is."

In light of the attention given to deaths after Taser shocks, Boyd said, it's not surprising that the mere threat of a jolt has led to more compliant arrestees in Nashville.

"One of the benefits may be that the Taser is taken more seriously, not only by police, but by the public, too," Boyd said.

Copyright © 2008 The Tennessean. All rights reserved