

# Shocking new cop weapon is non-lethal

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Armed and dangerous felons, folks who disturb the peace and other miscreants are in for a real shock.

Philadelphia's finest now have high-tech Taser stun guns, with 50,000 volts of paralyzing power, to use in difficult arrest situations to help cut down on deadly force or gunfire situations.

Commanders are learning how to use the Model 26 Tasers, which can shoot two probes up to 21 feet, disabling a suspect and decreasing the risk of injury to police officers.

Police SWAT experts already have several on the streets. And within a couple of weeks, a total of 65 guns should be available throughout the department, two in each police district, police say.

The stun guns could also help defuse situations like last July's shooting of a mentally ill man who wielded a chair at Amtrak police inside 30th Street Station, or the violent arrest a month later of carjacking suspect Thomas Jones that was videotaped and flashed around the world.

"It will assist us in [catching] a violent predator without serious injury," police spokeswoman Lt. Susan Slawson said. "Our job, whether it is a victim or a suspect, is to save lives."

For cops on the street, routine calls often require snap decisions. That's where Tasers can be used to prevent suspects from resisting arrest or escaping, or to protect officers and others from injury, especially someone who might be suicidal.

The Tasers, however, may not be used to disperse a crowd, prevent free speech or assembly, or to gain information, cops say.

Tasers work by sending an electrical current through a person, incapacitating him temporarily, according to police. Experts say Tasers can also cause stiff muscles, muscle spasms, dizziness and short-term memory loss.

Taser International, the company that manufactures the guns, says the weapons are non-lethal and work by simply overriding the human nervous system with a current that does not damage organs or tissue.

"If this is an effective way to reduce crime and keep the peace, it's a good thing," said David Almasi, director of the National Center for Public Policy Research, an education and research foundation based in Washington.

Police in Mobile, Ala., Bellevue, Wash., and Akron, Ohio, are using Tasers. In Cincinnati, police have been using Tasers for four years, and are debating whether to buy an additional 700 devices. Police in Medford, Ore., also are considering using the devices.

The Akron police department bought 20 Tasers last June, and finds them so useful, it plans to buy another 20 this year, according to officials there.

A Taser was used successfully to subdue a mentally ill man who'd slit his wrists, allowing paramedics to attend to him. ■

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JIM MacMILLAN/DAILY NEWS

One of the new Taser stun guns that can subdue violent or disturbed suspects without gunfire.