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City officers implementing nonlethal electric weapon

By Robert Medley
Staff Writer

The Air Taser, a weapon that fires electricity instead of bullets, should be on the streets in about two weeks, Oklahoma City police said Wednesday.

The M-26 Air Taser could be used in situations such as the one Sunday, in which a 28-year-old man was shot and killed by a police officer. Police said Shawn Holden raised a knife and lunged at the officer.

However, it is difficult to predict exactly when a Taser will come in handy, police Sgt. Blake Webster said.

"I can't really give you a set of circumstances

for when the Tasers will be used," Webster said.

The risk of injury to an officer must be considered in each situation, he said.



In June, police began training with less-lethal weapons. Webster, in charge of the training program, said about 50 police officers have learned how to use the weapons so far.

Webster has 50 Tasers stored in his office and plans to order another 50. His plan calls for

eight Tasers in each of the city's four districts at all times.

The Tasers are not going to eliminate the need for guns.

The Taser policy will require two officers to be present when a Taser is in use. One officer will

hold the Taser while another officer, armed with a gun, will cover him.

"Tasers are not always an option, but the Tasers are another tool in our toolbox," Webster said.

Sometimes, even a gunshot does not stop a person who charges an officer with a weapon, Webster said.

"It's not like on TV," he said. "When you shoot someone, they don't always fall over."

Also, police are not trained to shoot someone in the leg or arm.

"We train to fire at their center mass to stop the threat," Webster said.

The Oklahoma City Council approved the Tasers Aug. 14. The weapons had not been distributed to officers before Sunday's shooting.

On Wednesday, the state medical examiner's of-

fice said Holden died of multiple gunshot wounds. A final autopsy report has not been released.

Officer Todd Deaton, 36, a seven-year veteran, is on routine administrative leave while the investigation into the shooting continues. Because the shooting happened in Cleveland County, District Attorney Tim Kuykendall will review the case and decide if the shooting was justified.

The Tasers fire two insulated electric wires with fish hook tips that latch onto clothing or skin and then cause muscles to contract. The victim is likely to fall over. Webster said the current isn't strong enough to cause death, but people can be injured or killed when they fall over. Those hit by a Taser current can recover within a few seconds from the shock. Each Taser costs \$500, and the one-use-only cartridges that hold the wires cost \$17 each.