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with Capt. Greg Meyer (ret.)

TASER Tactics Update

by PoliceOne.com Columnist Greg Meyer
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When we use force to effect an arrest, of course we want to do it in an “objectively reasonable” manner, because that is the law of the land decided in 1989 by the United States Supreme Court in *Graham v. Connor*.

TASER tactics continue to improve over the past quarter century of experience. The increasing number of lawsuit dismissals and emerging case law that supports TASER use are welcome developments as we seek to use force in a manner that reduces injuries to officers and suspects.

This month I want to share with you some observations and emphasize certain tactics in the spirit of “continuous improvement” as you seek to reduce injuries to yourself and your violent suspects.

I recently reviewed Version 13 of the TASER lesson plan DVD. There are several tactical topics worth emphasizing.

One of the most important developments of the past year or so is that when you encounter someone who is in a state of “excited delirium,” if the tactical situation permits you should call for emergency medical service *before* engaging the suspect. Get the paramedics rolling your way.

Don't wait for them to arrive, go ahead and subdue the suspect. But it is helpful to have EMT arrive soon after to deal with the medical issues of a person who is under excited delirium, and try to prevent them from dying in your custody.

Several doctors I'm listening to at various seminars teach that the TASER is the best way to quickly subdue such an individual and stop the hyperactivity that occasionally leads to sudden deaths following restraint, regardless of what police tool or tactic was used.

Paramedic protocols have been developed to render immediate aid that might save the life. Such a response needs to be coordinated through awareness training and development of response

procedures with your paramedics, your dispatchers, and your field officers.

For lots of current information on excited delirium, please see [Chris Lawrence's PoliceOne column](#). Also, take a look at www.ipicd.com and consider attending the Custody Death Symposium in Las Vegas on November 16-17, 2006.

One important tactic featured on Version 13 is the “three-point contact.” Picture that you’ve fired your TASER darts at the suspect, but only one dart successfully lodged in the suspect’s skin or clothing. If tactically safe, you can then move in and apply the “drive-stun” mode to another part of the body and close the circuit, thus facilitating effective incapacitation. This is a very effective tactic that should be practiced in your dynamic, interactive training.

Also, TASER instructors and users of the past couple of years should be aware of the tactic of “cuffing under power.” This means that during the normal 5-second TASER application cycle, officers move in and handcuff the suspect while he or she is incapacitated.

“Cuffing under power” also needs to be taught in a dynamic, interactive training session that demonstrates to your officers that they will not themselves be “zapped” as long as they don’t introduce their hands into the path of the circuit. This is easy to teach, but it needs to be done “on the mats” with real or simulated exposures.

Finally, you need to understand that people who are under excited delirium tend to NOT feel pain! (Maybe that’s why they choose to get high in the first place?) Therefore, the drive-stun mode, which depends on pain-compliance, is not likely to be effective on a person under excited delirium.

The TASER dart-mode is to be generally preferred over the drive-stun mode in TASER incidents, but the dart-mode is likely the only mode that will work in an excited-delirium situation.

In addition to the above thoughts from my review of Version 13 of TASER’s training program, I ask you to consider the difference between “compliance” and “control.”

Perhaps you’ve noticed the same thing I have. The problematic TASER incidents—ones that cost you headlines, internal investigations, and lawsuits—are frequently incidents where the officer is trying to achieve *compliance* with the officer’s directions, as opposed to trying to achieve *control* of an actively or aggressively and physically resisting suspect.

This is a very dicey subject! Each agency makes its own policies. If there is a use of force continuum, each agency gets to decide where to place each tool and tactic.

Further, there is a wonderful appellate court decision called *Draper v. Reynolds* that supported the officer’s preemptive use of the TASER for a verbal noncompliance situation when the officer-subject factors indicated that there would be a serious fight if the officer approached.

Still, we must come to grips with the fact that some officers in some agencies use the TASER in situations that most of us would agree are frivolous. The infamous video of an officer using a TASER on a lady sitting in a vehicle during a traffic stop, who would not put down her cellphone and produce her driver’s license, is an example.

Each of us, in our training and in our field practices, must ensure that force is indeed “objectively reasonable” considering the facts and circumstances of the incident the officer faces.

TASER tactics will continue to evolve, just as all tactics do, over the course of time and with the wisdom that comes from experience.

Greg Meyer, a retired Captain from the Los Angeles Police Academy, served for 30 years, including eight years as a commanding officer. Greg is a member of the National Advisory Board of the Force Science Research Center, a member of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP).

He holds the Certified Litigation Specialist credential of the Americans for Effective Law Enforcement (AELE), and is a member of the AELE seminar faculty for lethal and nonlethal weapons issues.

He is chairman of the Training Seminars Committee of the Peace Officers Association of Los Angeles County (POALAC); and he serves on the advisory board for "POLICE" magazine.

Greg has served as a use of force expert witness in his official capacity for the Los Angeles City Attorney and Los Angeles District Attorney, as well as privately across the United States. He specializes in risk management issues including policy, training, equipment, tactics, supervision and review processes, with a focus on injury reduction during lethal and nonlethal encounters.

He was an expert witness during the Rodney King federal civil trial, and he was a consultant for the defense during the sentencing phase of the criminal trial.

He is the recipient of Defensive Tactics Newsletter's leadership award for his research in the nonlethal weapons field. Greg can be reached at: gregmeyer@earthlink.net

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