

# Use of TASERs decreases injuries

By Laura Carr

When Cincinnati Police Chief Thomas Streicher and former Cincinnati City Manager Valerie Lemmie approved the purchase of TASERs™ it was with the safety of both Cincinnati's police officers and the public in mind. According to the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD), TASERs have reduced the need for police officers to have physical, potentially violent, encounters with resistive suspects.

The CPD began using TASERs X26 in 2004. Since then, TASERs have been deployed 1,041 times (through September 2005) to subdue suspects thereby lessening injuries to officers or those they seek to apprehend. The TASER is one more tool police officers can turn to if it becomes necessary to use force.

## Effective, less intrusive

"If the mere threat of having a TASER used is enough to stop a crime, then I'm happy with that outcome," says Chief Streicher. "No police officer ever starts a workday with the intention of hurting someone," he states. "The TASER provides our officers with the least intrusive, safest and most effective method of subduing a combative suspect."

Chief Streicher knows what he is talking about. When the City of Cincinnati was considering the purchase of TASERs, Chief Streicher was an early volunteer to experience the effects of a TASER.

"I wanted to know how the TASER felt," he says. "I wasn't going to have police officers on the streets using TASERs without the full knowledge of how they work and the impact they have on the person. I am confident that TASERs offer a quickly effective and relatively safe means of stopping violent confrontations.

"To date, our officers have used TASERs to subdue more than 50 suspects who were armed with deadly weapons."

The CPD's successful integration of TASERs as a means to subdue a suspect is replicated in 8,000 cities and 45 countries. The new technology has become part of a growing trend in law enforcement. The equipment has a proven track record of saving lives and reducing injuries to officers and suspects.

**Comparing the last 12 months before TASERs were used with the first 12 months of their use, injuries to police officers are down 56%; injuries to suspects are down 35%.**

## The safest alternative

The word is clearly on the street about TASERs. They hurt, but they do not kill. In many cases police officers can end a confrontation before it escalates into a more dangerous situation for the police and the person(s) they are trying to apprehend.

"We are convinced TASERs are the safest alternative in a use of force situation and the statistics in cities where TASERs are being used bear out our findings. TASER use can save lives when deadly use of force may have been the only other option," says Streicher.

The CPD closely monitors all TASER deployments. There have been no deaths directly related to their usage, according to Executive Manager S. Gregory Baker, CPD Police Relations. Baker also serves as the CPD Compliance Coordinator for the U. S. Department of Justice Memorandum of Agreement and Collaborative Agreement.

Baker says, "Use of force, as a whole, has declined since the deployment of TASERs. Physical harm to prisoners and suspects was down 35 percent in the first full year of TASER use, compared to the last full year without TASERs. Physical harm to officers was down 56 percent over the same periods of time. TASERs have created a different environment for subduing those engaged in criminal activity. We have fewer injuries and more cooperation from persons who

do not want a police officer to apply a TASER," he adds.

The CPD's use of force statistics and the City of Cincinnati's Independent Monitor's review of use of force incidents clearly demonstrate that TASERs have substituted for other types of force, such as physical force, impact weapons and chemical spray. Using a TASER can eliminate the need for a police officer to close the distance between himself or herself and the suspect. The Independent Monitor has noted that TASERs are an alternative use of force method along with de-escalating the situation, verbal instructions or using other arrest control techniques.

## How TASERs work

The X-26 TASER is an electronic control device that is a non-lethal force alternative used to assist officers in the performance of their duties. The TASER is designed to temporarily immobilize a non-compliant, violent or potentially violent person.

Each TASER has an internal tracking chip. The chip stores the time and date the trigger was engaged. Not considered a firearm, it uses compressed nitrogen to launch two tiny barbs or probes attached to two 21-foot wires. When these probes make contact with an assailant or his or her clothing, the TASER sends powerful electronic pulses through the wires, which instantly incapacitates the assailant for five seconds without causing any permanent injury. Since TASERs immediately immobilize a person, minor injuries could result, particularly from a fall to the ground.

## Volts versus Amperage

The TASER uses a simple high-energy, "shaped" pulse of 50,000 volts to penetrate a subject's clothing and skin. In comparison, a static charge from walking on carpet and touching another person produces an average of 35,000 volts.

Amperage (amps), not voltage, is what produces serious physical harm. Contact with a common household wall outlet produces 15 to 30 amps. The TASER produces 0.0021 of one amp.

## Officer Injuries from arrests/assaults

February 2003 to January 2004 = 72  
February 2004 to January 2005 = 32

Decrease in injuries = 56%

## Prisoner/Suspect Injuries

February 2003 to January 2004 = 318  
February 2004 to January 2005 = 207

Decrease in injuries = 35%

Note: February 2003 to January 2004 was the last full year *before* the use of TASERs  
February 2004 to January 2005 was the first full year *after* the use of TASERs

### Recent case

A recent CPD case where a TASER was used involved an extremely emotional hostage situation. A man was holding his former girlfriend hostage in her home and threatening her with physical harm. Police SWAT teams arrived to negotiate for the woman's release.

In an increasingly tense situation officers attempted to use beanbag shots to subdue the man who was wielding a knife. After repeated rounds, SWAT officers decided to use a TASER in an attempt to get the woman out of harm's way and to safety. The deployment of the TASER worked immediately.

"Before we had TASERs, and given the death threat to the hostage, this situation could have necessitated a police

officer having to shoot the man to free the woman being held against her will," says Baker. "In this case and many others, we have had more positive outcomes and fewer serious injuries because an officer has another way to diffuse a highly dangerous situation."

According to Captain Howard Rahtz, CPD Training Section Commander, the entire 2005 police recruit class volunteered to experience a TASER. "It was the general consensus among our newest police officers. They wanted to know first-hand what a TASER barb felt like as well as how quickly a TASER could immobilize someone. The Police Chief, Public Information Officer Lieutenant Kurt Byrd and I, as well as many other police

officers, have volunteered to experience the effects of a TASER for the same reasons," Rahtz concluded.

### Most revolutionary in 35 years

"The TASER X26 is the only instrument to revolutionize an aspect of policing in the past 35 years," says Streicher. "The last piece of equipment to have a similar effect on police operations was the personally assigned portable radio system which occurred in the late 1960s, early '70s. We are seeing a significant reduction in injuries to our officers and to suspects. That is impressive and reaffirms what an important difference TASERs are making in our work." 🐾

## Two New Assistant Chiefs Appointed



Assistant Police Chief  
Michael Cureton

Two Cincinnati Police captains were appointed Assistant Chiefs by former City Manager Valerie Lemmie earlier this year.

"After an exhaustive search, a diverse team of Cincinnatians found what many of us already knew - that

the Cincinnati Police Department trains and develops officers as well as any police department in America," said Mayor Charlie Luken.

Michael Cureton was sworn in on June 22. He had been serving as the commander of District 2. He graduated from the Police Academy in 1976. Cureton rose through the ranks and was promoted to captain in 1998. In his new position he holds the rank of lieutenant colonel and is in charge of the Resource Bureau, which includes Evidence/Property Management, Finance Management and Inspections.

Cureton holds a bachelor of arts in communications from Xavier University. He graduated from the Police Executive Leadership College in 1999 and the FBI National Academy Association in 2000. He and his wife, Jennifer, have five children.

"Being a police officer represents the ultimate in service to today's society," says Cureton. "We are faced with incredible challenges that keep our jobs interesting and encourage our creativity as problem solvers. To be selected as a peacemaker is an honorable and worthwhile position, a role in which I feel enormous pride."

James Whalen was sworn in on September 7. He had been serving as commander of District 1. Whalen began his career in 1982 as a police officer in the Metropolitan-Dade County Police Department (Miami, Florida). In 1986 he joined the CPD, rising through the ranks until he was promoted to captain in 2001. He now holds the rank of lieutenant colonel and is in charge of the Investigations Bureau which includes Central Vice Control and Criminal Investigation.

Whalen holds a bachelor of science degree in criminal justice/law enforcement from the University of Cincinnati and a law degree from the Salmon P. Chase College of Law at Northern Kentucky University.

He graduated from the FBI National Academy in 1999 and in 2004 completed the Certified Law Enforcement Executive Officer course. He and his wife, Colleen, have four children.

"Being one of the senior commanders here is the ultimate compliment and an exciting career challenge. I have an outstanding team of skilled professionals working in the Investigations Bureau and I am honored to be here," says Whalen. 🐾



Assistant Police Chief  
James Whalen