

Campus police now equipped with Tasers

ASU is first university in Arizona to use electronic rifles

By Sarah Muench

The ASU Department of Public Safety will be the first among Arizona public universities to use Taser guns beginning next semester.

Tasers, which look like regular pistols, shoot two electrodes connected to a wire that shallowly penetrate the skin. The electrodes send 50,000 volts of electricity through the body, causing the victim to fall to the ground, unable to



move.

"Tasers temporarily incapacitate them, and they allow us to take the person into custody without injuries," said ASU DPS Lt. John Sutton. Sutton said DPS' use of Tasers is part of a plan to increase the arsenal of law enforcement tools. He said officers already use pepper spray and 12-gauge pump-action beanbag shotguns.

"I don't think that we will be using [Tasers] a lot, but you only need to use it once to be affected," Sutton said. "It's just better to have it."

The four purchased Tasers and usage training cost the department nearly \$2,000. The Tasers cost \$434 apiece.

The 40 officers who were trained to use the equipment had to undergo a shot from the Taser themselves, according to Sutton.

Media Credit: Kate Packer

ASU's Department of Public Safety has purchased four Taser guns, shown above. The Taser guns are currently being held in storage awaiting policy approval.

ASU DPS Sgt. Allen Clark, who trained the officers, said trainees must be shot with Tasers so they can testify what it's like to be shot by it.

"We also want each officer to feel the effects because we don't want officers abusing it on people by using it inappropriately," Clark said. "Some of the officers' reactions were comical, and it was an eye-opening experience for them."

DPS Cpl. Al Phillips said the Taser completely immobilized him during the training.

"It's like a really strong jolt," Phillips said. "I fell to my knees and then completely face down on the mat, and I couldn't move at all for a few seconds. My legs were sore afterward like I just had gone through a tough workout."

Phillips said using the Taser reduces the chance for injury in a violent situation.

"I feel pretty confident using it. I know that by using it, the person won't get hurt," he said.

Officers can use Tasers from three to 21 feet away from a person, Sutton said, but the preferred range is 12 to 18 feet to allow officers space in case the person doesn't immediately respond to the Taser.

Clark said the Taser might be useful when police encounter students behaving belligerently under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

"Tasers override the central nervous system and affect muscle groups as well," Clark said.

Neither NAU nor UA campus police use Tasers.

"We don't use Tasers because we just don't," said UA campus police Commander Kevin Haywood. "We have other methods like beanbag shotguns and pepper spray."

Want to be heard? Post your opinion in the forum below.

Reach the reporter at sarah.muench@asu.edu.

Editorial: Tasers bring shock and 'ha' to ASU police

Tempe, AZ -- April 24, 2003

Last week, about 40 people sat around shooting one another with electrodes that sent 50,000 volts of happy goodness through their bodies.

It was a scene straight out of "Jackass," and the key players were members of our ASU community. And, just to verify that there is some form of cosmic humor in the universe, the players in this scene were members of the ASU campus police.

Of course, there was a purpose behind this madness. ASU police were training with their favorite new form of debilitating equipment: the TASER.

We capitalize this word not only to announce its presence and authority, but also because it is an acronym for, "Thomas A Swift Electric Rifle," named after a comic book character (Thomas A Swift) who shot an electric rifle that froze his enemies.

It's no surprise that a device that has brought so much comedy into the homes of "Cops" and "Real Stories of the Highway Patrol" viewers has such funny origins.

All in all, it's pretty obvious that the Tasers are a smart move on a campus that has seen its share of kidnappings, armed robberies and scary men loaded with weapons aimlessly wandering.

We do, however, have some concerns about this development. It's not so much the actual possession of Tasers that bother us, but the outright failure of ASU police to capitalize on the CASH COW (Cops Acting Stupid, How Can Others Watch?) that this training event could have been.

How much would you pay to zap the cop who pulled you over for failing to come to a complete stop or going 9 mph over the speed limit?

"Would you expect to pay \$500? Hardly. \$200? Not even close. For just \$49.99, you can shock your least favorite cop." With 40 cops participating, that would bring in nearly \$2,000, the approximate cost of the Tasers and training.

With the budget cuts that have spread like a cancer around this state, justifying the extra cost of Tasers and training could have been easily covered with a little bit of fundraising ingenuity.

Just take each officer's records, contact the last few people that he screwed over (wrongful arrests, imprisonments, etc.) and send out an order form for "payback!"

We wish no particular harm on the ASU police (as Taserless people, we have nothing but happy things to say about our friends with Tasers), but as long as they're getting shocked, they might as well make some money and satisfy some vengeful taxpayers at the same time.

We're glad to see our police a little more secure, but during the next training session they should be a bit more ambitious. To get them rolling, the show should be called "Shock and Ha!"