

## Forest Park adds stun gun to arsenal

By Ed Brock  
May 5, 2003

Face clinched in a frightful grimace, Forest Park police Capt. Chris Matson falls to the floor with two of his fellow officers on either arm.

A few minutes later, Matson can't even feel where the barbs of the M-26 Advanced Taser Weapon pierced his skin to deliver the electric shock that completely paralyzed him. There isn't even any blood since the electricity cauterizes the small wounds from the barbs and numbs the area around them.

"It's difficult to describe how it felt. I never felt anything like that before," Matson said, recalling the test that was part of the training Forest Park police officers will undertake before using the new non-lethal weapons. "Your muscles just contract immediately. You can't think about anything else ... aside from maybe when is it going to end."

Using block grant money the city has recently bought 55 of the Tasers at \$499 apiece plus some \$230 more for the training that includes being shocked by the instrument. That training started last week with Matson as the initial test subject.

Once the Tasers hit the streets they will be counted along with telescoping ASP batons and pepper spray as a "less than lethal force option" for patrol officers. The best thing about the weapons is that, while they are highly effective deterrents against violent suspects when in use, "as soon as it's over, it's over."

"That's the point. The officer doesn't have to get close and the subject isn't injured," Matson said.

The guns are relatively simple to use. A cartridge containing two barbs (basically straightened out No. 8 fishhooks) that are attached to the gun by wires is clipped onto the front of the gun.

When fired, a gas charge expels the barbs at the target and a five-second charge is sent through the wire. That charge is one fourth of the charge administered by a heart defibrillator and is even safe for someone wearing a pacemaker.

A laser sight assures accuracy of the top barb while the lower barb is designed to drop a little so its accuracy depends on distance.

Each time the Taser's trigger is squeezed an onboard computer chip records the action, a safeguard against accusations of overuse of the weapon on a subject.

Matson can't release some information on the Tasers regarding their effectiveness, but he did say the newer model is far better than the original Tasers that came into use several years ago.

"They had longer barbs that had to penetrate the skin," Matson said. "These don't have to penetrate the skin to work."

In fact, during the training most of the officers are not shot with the Taser, but the wires are simply taped to their shirts. Even without a cartridge the Taser can be used as a stun gun at close range.

The officer can carry two extra cartridges in the holster and, if they wish, one spare on the gun's grip. Also, once the barbs are in place repeated shocks can be administered if needed to subdue a subject, although that would be unlikely.

"You only want it once, that should be enough of a deterrent," Matson said.

Also, a suspect can be handled and handcuffed while they are being shocked by a Taser.

As far as he knows, Matson said, the Forest Park department is the first police force in Clayton County to use Tasers, but the Clayton County sheriff's tactical team has 13 of the weapons to use in certain situations inside the jail, sheriff's Lt. K.T. Smith said.

"Generally you show up and there's no need to deploy the Taser. It's a deterrent," Smith said.

Eventually the department hopes to buy additional Tasers to deploy in the field. The Clayton County Police Department has ordered 10 of the weapons for their road supervisors, spokesman Capt. Jeff Turner said.

"I'm sure if it proves to be effective we will order more to pass out to the patrol officers," Turner said.

**PHONE NUMBER: 404-608-2365**