

Ouch! Boca cops get taste of TASERs

Training session teaches officers correct use of stun guns

By STEPHANIE SLATER
STAFF WRITER

Officer Dave Rosenthal said it felt like he took a shower and stuck his finger in a light socket.

For Officer Kurt Brower likened it to a "really bad muscle spasm," and for Officer Sean Mile, the feeling was "incapacitating."

Rosenthal, Brower and Miles were just three of 13 Boca Raton police officers who experienced firsthand what it's like to be shot by a TASER on Wednesday.

So far, 62 officers have been trained to use the TASERs, non-lethal weapons that deliver an electric shock to stun violent offenders. The stun guns will be carried by all road-patrol officers.

Used in place of a baton or pepper spray, the TASER fires two probes up to a distance of 21 feet from a replaceable cartridge, explained Officer Mark Sapino, one of three TASER training instructors.

Sapino said that when the probes - which are connected to the weapon by high-voltage insulated wire - make contact with the target, the TASER transmits powerful electrical pulses along the wires and into the body of the target. TASERs carry a charge of 26 watts, or 50,000 volts.

"The shock can go through up to 2 inches of clothing," Sapino said. "And as long as the probes are in place, the suspect can be shocked again."

The shock takes over a person's nervous system and temporarily incapacitates them, said Sgt. Guy Parrinello.

"It totally immobilizes you, and everything you do is inadvertent," Parrinello said.

For the time being, Boca Raton Fire Rescue Services workers will be called to remove the probes from the suspect, said Sgt. Jim DeMott.

DeMott said most police departments have their own officers remove them, but as a precautionary measure the Boca department would leave that responsibility to the rescue workers. The probes leave small bee sting-like marks on the skin.

The purchase of 85 stun guns was approved by the Boca Raton City Council on Aug. 28 at a cost of \$60,790. Boca Raton is the first department in Palm Beach County to use the weapon.

Officer Brice Allen got a chance for a real-life test on the morning of Tuesday, Oct. 30. He used it more than four times on 32-year-old Corey M. Davis of the 200 block of N.E. 15th Terrace, when the man was arrested for running naked in the neighborhood and pounding on the door of a neighbor.

According to a police report, as Allen began to drive Davis to a holding cell at the Boca Raton police department, the suspect smashed the Plexiglas divider between the front and back seats, causing pieces to hit the back of Allen's head.

Allen said he stopped the car and fired the TASER twice - with Davis kicking at him.

When Boca Raton Fire Rescue Services workers arrived at the department to treat Davis' forehead cuts, police opened the holding cell and Davis lunged at Allen, the report said.

Allen said he shot Davis with the TASER two more times, and officers were able to place him in handcuffs. According to the report, Davis continued to struggle and Allen fired the TASER "several more times."

Davis, who was taken to Boca Raton Community Hospital and treated for cuts on his forehead and chin, was charged with indecent exposure, battery without injury and vandalism to government property.

He was released from Palm Beach County Jail on Monday on \$3,000 bond and is scheduled to appear in court on Dec. 7.

"The TASER leaves no injuries even under extreme conditions," said Rick Smith, president of TASER International.

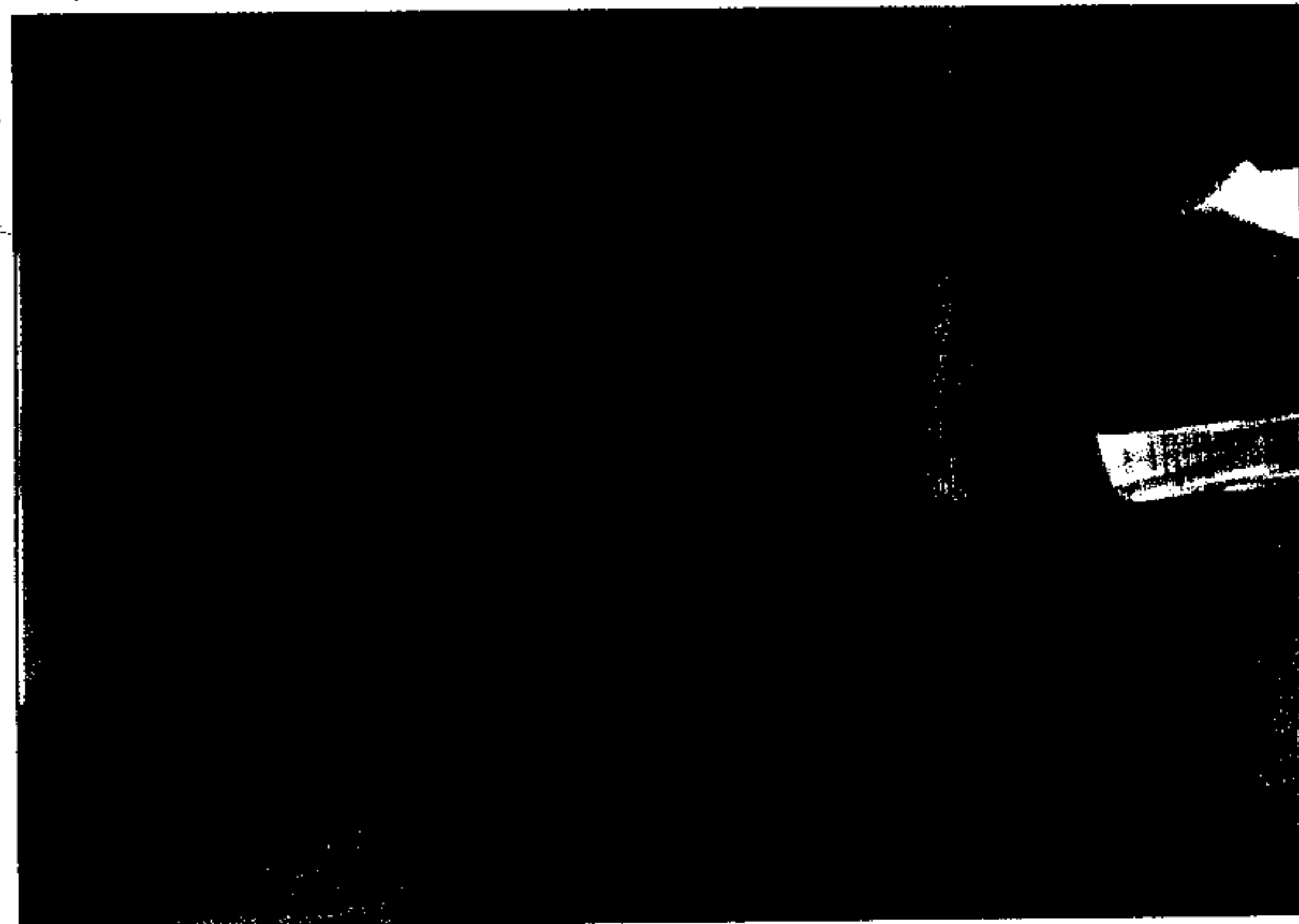
Dr. Paul Hendry, co-director of the Pacemaker Clinic at the University of Ottawa, Canada, said the TASER should pose no increase in risk even to patients with a pacemaker or implantable defibrillator.

*Sslater@bocanews.com



Steven McCann/STAFF PHOTO

Above: Officer Scott Garcia of the Boca Raton Police Department feels the pain after being shot by a TASER stun gun Wednesday during a training exercise. The Boca police department is the first in Palm Beach County to use the non-lethal weapons. Below: TASER stun guns shoot a probe - seen here after being fired at a Boca Raton officer during a training exercise - connected to the weapon by high-voltage wires.



Evol. Huomas/STAFF PHOTO