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Non-lethal weapon provides law enforcement with new tool

By Christoph Trappe

MUSCATINE, Iowa - Some Muscatine County sheriff's deputies now will be able to take a suspect to the ground without touching or shooting him or her.

The Sheriff's Department has bought one TASER, a non-lethal weapon that disables a person's central nervous system. The 50,000-volt weapon shoots two small darts at a person and then sends electronic pulses through the person's body, said Steve Stange, a certified TASER instructor.

"It just basically takes control of your body," Stange said. "And there's nothing you can do about it.

"It'll ruin your day and it's nothing you want to sign up for," he said. Stange knows because every certified TASER user has to experience the shock on his or her own body.

The electricity flows through the person for five seconds or until an officer turns off the TASER. The weapon can hit a target as far away as 21 feet.

For most of Friday, area law enforcement officers met at the Sheriff's Department to learn about the new weapon.

"Our department has (only)

one," said sheriff's Capt. David Lerch about the \$400 TASER. "Eventually, I'd like to see one on every shift so we can get them to an incident within 15 minutes or less.

"It gives us another tool in our toolbox," he said. "Rather than to use lethal force, we feel this is a better source."

Several national airline companies, including United Airlines, recently started equipping on-board personnel with the TASER, said Ron Rodenmeyer, a TASER representative.

Rodenmeyer said being hit by the TASER has no long-term medical effects.

"It will not even affect a pacemaker," he said.

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