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Thursday, May 24, 2001

Shockingly effective

By **ANDREW SEYMOUR**, Ottawa Sun

PRAISING Tasers as a stunning success, Ottawa police are recommending every front-line officer in Ontario should have access to the high-powered but non-lethal weapons.

"We're highly recommending that it has been an effective, less-lethal option," said tactical team Staff Sgt. Mike Ryan yesterday.

The Ottawa police recommendation follows a 12-month test period where the incapacitating Taser technology was used 17 times in subduing emotionally disturbed or combative suspects in the capital.

The recommendation will be outlined in a report submitted to the Ministry of the Solicitor General and the Ottawa Police Services Board at the end of



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the Solicitor General and the Ottawa Police Services Board at the end of May. "We've found it's been much more effective than the other less-lethal options we have available to us," said Ryan.

'HUMANE'

"This has been found to be more effective than pepper spray and it is certainly more humane than the use of an asp (baton)," he said.

The Ottawa police currently have 15 Tasers, which are capable of sending a 50,000-volt electrical current to an unco-operative suspect. The number of Tasers could soon grow, though, as Ottawa Police Chief Vince Bevan recently said he hoped to have the weapon in every supervisor's vehicle. In April, the Ministry of the Solicitor General extended Ottawa's trial period indefinitely.

Ryan said one of the most successful uses of the Taser was when tactical officers stopped a suicidal woman who was threatening to throw her seven-year-old son off a Queensway overpass before jumping off herself.

"I don't think we have any other weapon in our arsenal that could have dealt with that," said Ryan, adding only once did the Taser fail to initially subdue its intended target.

Ryan said in the majority of cases where the weapon was used, police were dealing with emotionally disturbed people who suffered from mental illness. In nearly half the cases, the person was armed with a sharp-edged weapon and threatened to hurt themselves or others.

PARALYZING BURST

"(The Taser) actually overpowers the neuromuscular reaction, which is why it works on people who are psychotic or in a chemically induced state," said

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it works on people who are psychotic or in a chemically induced state," said Ryan.

The Tasers deliver a pulsating and paralyzing burst of electricity from two tiny probes. The probes, which look like tiny darts, are connected to wires that lead back to the Taser. They can be fired from as far as 21 feet away and deliver a powerful shock through as much as two inches of clothing.

The incapacitating pain from the electrical jolt goes away almost as soon as the current is turned off.

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