



Police armed with new Taser guns

FRONT PAGE

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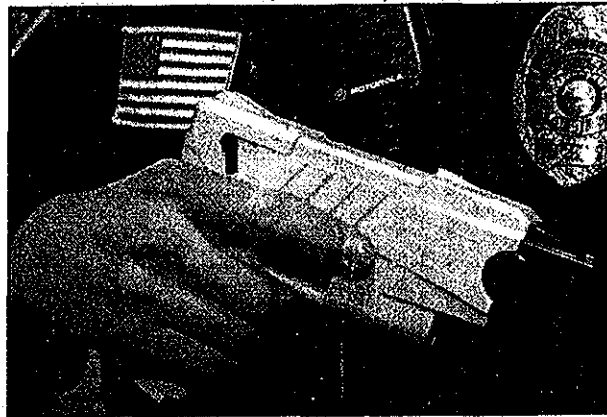
A new policy and new Taser stun guns are now in use by the Rochester Police Department.

The changes follow a review of department procedures and equipment made after a city man was shot by a police officer who thought he had fired his electric stun gun instead of his handgun.

That shooting occurred Sept. 2 when officers were responding to a call about an intoxicated man who was fighting and damaging property.

Christofar Atak, 31, ended up being shot once in the back and spent several weeks in the hospital. Authorities said the officer, Greg Siem, was trying to subdue an intoxicated Atak who was scuffling with another officer when he used his handgun instead of his Taser.

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension investigated the shooting and has ruled it an accident. The matter is still under review by the Ramsey County Attorneys Office to determine if



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The Rochester Police Department has switched to a different model of the Taser Gun.

charges will be filed against the officer or Atak. The Atak family also has hired civil trial lawyers to investigate the incident.

Police Chief Roger Peterson said at the time that the Taser stun gun in use by the department looked and felt identical to handguns used by the officers. In this case, he said Siem mistakenly grabbed his handgun, thinking it was the stun gun.

While the shooting was

ruled accidental, the incident automatically triggered an internal review of department policy and the equipment.

Police Capt. Jim Pittenger said Wednesday that the goal is to make the gun more distinguishable and still make it a safe option for officers to use in emergency situations.

The new Taser stun gun is yellow as opposed to black, and has a slightly different grip.

"That means that visually

"Visually it is identifiable as a Taser as opposed to being a handgun."

— Police Capt. Jim Pittenger

it is identifiable as a Taser as opposed to being a handgun," Pittenger said. That benefits the officer and citizens who immediately know it is not a real gun.

Policy changes also have been made, Pittenger said.

Each officer now must carry the stun gun on the opposite side of where the officer's handgun is carried. Siem was carrying both his handgun and Taser on the same side the night Atak was shot.

When not in use, the stun gun must be carried in a fanny-pack type compartment.

Electric stun guns became standard equipment in all city squad cars in June 2001 as a tool to help officers subdue violent people without causing permanent injury.