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# Sheriff's office to outfit force with 60 tasers

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THURSTON COUNTY — They deliver something that feels like a swift punch, leaving a person breathless and unable to move for a few minutes, but they're less painful than pepper spray and far less lethal than a bullet.

They're tasers, and the Thurston County Sheriff's Office will buy 60 of them with the help of a \$50,000 law enforcement grant.

"This would allow us to equip our officers with less deadly force. It's very effective, has no long-lasting effect, but it is very incapacitating," said Ray Hansen, chief criminal deputy for the sheriff's office.

Hansen presented the plan for using the grant to Thurston County Commissioners. The majority of the grant — \$36,000 — will be used on the tasers.

"We thought this (grant) was about the only source we could go to for these," Hansen said.

"It's becoming more common where deputies are having to deal with physical confrontations with people," he said.

Tasers give officers a tool to use with violent, combative suspects — often people who have mental illness problems or are on drugs — other than pepper spray, batons or guns.

A taser is a small plastic device that shoots two metal prongs on wires for up to 21 feet. The prongs deliver a five-second electrical charge that stuns a suspect, rendering his or her muscles useless for about five minutes.

"You don't have a pain sensation. You have an immobilization sensation," said

Hansen, who took a shot from a taser as part of training.

After being hit, "You remain with a sensation similar to having your foot go to sleep," Hansen said.

Tumwater police Chief Mike Vandiver describes it as a "really strange feeling. It's like someone hitting you really hard. It disrupts your ability to move.

"It's definitely an uncomfortable feeling. You know when you've been hit."

Tumwater officers were equipped with tasers in fall 2000, and also took taser hits as part of their training "so officers know what it feels like," Vandiver said.

Vandiver is aware of a taser being used by Tumwater officers only once, and that was when a drunken driver became violent after being stopped.

"It's most definitely a good tool to have," he said.

Among other items to be purchased with the law enforcement grant are:

■ **Two pinhole** surveillance cameras, mainly used when fraud is suspected at a business.

■ **An upgrade of phone** lines at Rochester High and Rochester Middle schools, where sheriff radio transmissions are often poor or don't work at all. The phone lines will work with an upgrade in communications hardware.

■ **A night-vision** monocular for the SWAT team.

■ **A computer for** use with phone lines into the jail. Phone lines are legally monitored, and inmates are warned of the monitoring, but inmates frequently call from the jail to make threats, Hansen said. This is particularly common in domestic violence situations.

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