

Georgia university says tasers intimidate

Officers at the State University of West Georgia have carried the weapon for two years

By KATI JIVIDEN
Staff Writer

Dual laser beams from a taser is all you need to intimidate a student, an officer from the State University of West Georgia said Monday.

"They were scared for their life," said Sgt. Laura Bennett, a police officer with West Georgia's Department of Public Safety.

But Bennett said, "We've never deployed the taser. We have drawn the taser on some students and the response was alarming."

West Georgia, located about an hour from Atlanta, is one of several universities around the county carrying the advanced taser, a less-lethal weapon that stuns by electric shock. Officers there have carried tasers for two years. They also carry firearms,

pepper spray and an expandable baton.

West Georgia's officers have a second less-lethal weapon called pepperballs — they deploy pepper spray and bruise, sting and inhibit breathing — in their squad cars. Those are on hand for potential riots.

"I am surprised" we've never used the tasers, Bennett said. "I know what it feels like. I don't want to do that to someone."

Officials from Iowa State University's Department of Public Safety are trying to convince the community to allow them to be armed with tasers — the same brand and make issued to the West Georgia officers.

The Board of Regents has refused to allow the state-certified officers to carry guns. That decision was made in the 1960s.

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Tasers: ISU only school in Big 12 without arms

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ISU, the University of Iowa and the University of Delaware are the only universities with a student population of 20,000-plus that do not arm their officers with handguns. In the Big 12 and the Land Grant 11, ISU is the only school not to be armed.

"It's insane not to carry a gun," Bennett said when told ISU's public safety officers do not carry weapons. "There is no way I would allow my officers to respond to city calls without weapons. That is extremely dangerous."

Bennett said officers use their tasers when students are combative or a harm to themselves or others. Tasers also would be used if a student had a knife.

"It's very effective," she said, noting the city police department has deployed its tasers. It has been used "when we've had some mentally off people, who we've had to evict from campus, or someone who is off their medicine ... You don't want to kill someone if you don't have to."

Every time an officer draws his or her taser, it is documented, Bennett said.

When one is used, the taser releases microdots and time stamps and dates the incident.

STATE UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

Location: Carrollton, Ga., about an hour from Atlanta
Student population: About 10,000

Department name: State University of West Georgia
Department of Public Safety

Staff: Security guards, parking enforcement and 17 state-certified, sworn officers

Crime: Biggest crime is alcohol, followed by burglaries.

Web site: www.westga.edu

The information would also be downloaded by a public safety official and be made available to the public.

"If you're not resisting or you're not causing a problem, there is no chance of being hit," Bennett said, adding the chances of getting hit in the eye are slim because officers aim for the center mass of a person's body.

"It's an occupational hazard," she added. "If you want to be a thief, you have to deal with what's coming ... You get what you ask for."

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