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Shocking news from UI Public Safety

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UI campus police officers carry batons, pepper spray, and 50,000 volts of electricity strapped to their belts to help ensure campus safety.

Since late April, officers have used the Taser M26, a less-than-lethal weapon that resembles a handgun. Using compressed nitrogen, the Taser shoots two small darts into a target up to 21 feet away, delivering an electric shock that causes immediate loss of muscle control.

"It's a sharp jolt, and it's intense," said Chuck Green, the UI assistant vice president for Public Safety. "Anything you're carrying in your hand will drop immediately."

Thirty of 31 officers, including car, foot and bike patrol officers, are armed with Tasers. The debut of the M26 concluded a two-year push from Public Safety officials to arm officers.

"It's certainly a sense of accomplishment," Green said. "This was a big project."

Officers received a week-long training course before being issued the Taser so they could familiarize themselves with all aspects of the weapon. The training included receiving a blast from the gun.

Officers say the Taser is a welcome addition to the force, allowing them to effectively disarm suspects and officer safety.

"Now, our officers won't have to 'close-combat' anyone," said Duane Papke, the Public Safety assistant director. "This is a big step forward."



However, the department will still rely on backup from Iowa City police in cases where there may be one or more armed suspects, officials said.

"It is an issue of safety," said master instructor and Public Safety Lt. Steve Stange. "If you fight deadly force with less-than-deadly force, you are guaranteed to lose."

The entire Taser program costs approximately \$15,000, comparable with arming the entire force with standard-issue hand-guns. Besides the Taser, officers are issued three one-time use cartridges. Shocking someone with the Taser will be a last resort,

officers say.

"This will not be a heavily used piece of equipment," Stange said. "We will use it only when we have to."

The UI remains the only school in the Big Ten whose campus police do not carry lethal weapons, such as handguns.

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