

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**TASERs:  
A Safe and Effective Force Option for Law Enforcement**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Much attention has been devoted to the research, development, and implementation of less-lethal and non-lethal weapons, such as the TASER, to supplement the officer's standard lethal options. A wide-spread debate, however, is going on between supporters of the TASER and opponents of the TASER regarding whether the weapon is a safe force option for law enforcement. Aside from personal experiences, information for this study was obtained from an abundance of news articles in both print and television media following law enforcement use of TASER, books, government studies, and a survey administered to representatives of twenty-four law enforcement agencies from across the state of Texas. This research endeavor found that no deaths occurring after the TASER was deployed on an individual could be directly and solely attributed to the TASER. With proper training of officers and adherence to sound departmental policy, law enforcement agencies should find the TASER to be a relatively safe and undeniably effective force option for law enforcement.

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant concerns an officer faces is the use of force and having to make a split-second decision as to what degree he is justified by law and departmental policy to use it in any given situation. Although the handgun seems to be the most widely known icon associated with an American police officer, law enforcement officers throughout the United States and abroad have a variety of less-lethal or non-lethal weapons at their disposal. Those weapons include pepper spray; a variety of striking instruments, such as the traditional police baton and the ASP (a collapsible baton); a control stick; among others.

Much attention of late has been devoted to the research, development, and implementation of less-lethal and non-lethal weapons to supplement the officer's standard lethal options. One of those options is the TASER, which has been the subject of much on-going attention in the media. The TASER is a gun-shaped device that delivers 50,000 volts of electric shock and is used to subdue, control, and apprehend an uncooperative, combative, or dangerous suspect. The author is familiar with the TASER M26 and the X26, which are the two most common models in law enforcement. The X26 is the most recent, advanced development. They both use a cartridge to fire two stainless steel barbs that are connected to the TASER by either a 15-foot or a 21-foot copper wire, depending on which cartridge is selected. Each deployment sends the stunning charge of electricity through the copper wires to the barbs and ultimately to the target. The TASER can also be used in "drive stun" mode, which is rendered without the cartridge attached by pressing the tip of the device directly into the person's skin or clothing.

The majority of, if not all, law enforcement agencies in the United States recognize a use of force continuum and mandate use of the continuum by its officers. The range begins with the officer's command presence and ends with the use of deadly force. In between lie less-lethal and non-lethal options, one of which is the TASER. While a growing number of departments are now implementing the TASER into that force continuum, some other agencies have not yet bought into the idea and do not provide the TASER as an option because of safety and liability concerns.

The purpose of this research paper is to answer the question: Are TASERs a safe, effective force option for a non-lethal weapon in law enforcement? Some agencies tout the TASER as an integral addition to their departmental arsenal, while other agencies are prohibited by state law from utilizing them. The fact remains the TASER is becoming a more common tool available to law enforcement officers.

In recent months several newspapers across the nation have published articles calling into question the safety of the TASER. This research paper will explore books, journals, periodicals, and newspapers in an attempt to answer the question posed. The author will also conduct personal interviews of certified TASER instructors and a survey of a small number of fellow officers from across the state. Additionally, the author will draw on his own personal experiences involving the device.

TASER use by police is obviously a hot topic in the court of public opinion, and information relating to TASER deployment appears on a frequent basis in several law enforcement-related periodicals and journals. The research will investigate several specific cases looking for both successes and failures. Several very recent studies have been conducted by government and private agencies to research the safety and

effectiveness of the TASER, and the author will review those conclusions in his research.

Based on the author's knowledge of the subject, the anticipated outcome is that research findings will suggest that TASERs indeed provide a safe and effective non-lethal option for law enforcement. The research will likely indicate that any injuries sustained in relation to the use of TASERs are very minor and that any deaths that might occur to suspects subdued with the TASER will be attributed to other factors than the TASER itself.

The information collected in this research and compiled in this paper will serve as a reference point for other law enforcement agencies who are seeking additional non-lethal options to add to their force continuum. Agency administrators who are debating whether to provide TASERs for departmental use may review the findings of this investigation to assist them in reaching a conclusion.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

One of the first tasks the author tackled in reviewing the literature available was to understand the multiple, seemingly conflicting terms associated with the degree of potential lethality attributed to the TASER. Rappert (2003) referred to some of the alternative identifiers as "less-lethal" and "less-than-lethal", citing that the "less-lethal" term is more common among police in the United States and Europe because of the potential for liability stemming from deaths that might occur when a weapon deemed "non-lethal" is used. In a Department of Defense study conducted by The Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Human Effects Center of Excellence (Department of Defense, 2005) in concert with the Air Force Research Laboratory, one will find that the United States

Department of Defense Policy Directive 3003.3 defines a “non-lethal” weapon as one that is “explicitly designed and primarily employed...to incapacitate personnel or materiel, while minimizing fatalities, permanent injury to personnel, and undesired damage to property and the environment” (DoD, 2005, p. 11). TASER International, the company that manufactures the most common stun devices (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2005), also uses the term “non-lethal” as defined by the U.S. Department of Defense to describe its product in a June 28, 2005 training bulletin. The bulletin notes that the Department of Defense does not dictate that a non-lethal weapon have absolutely no possibility of causing fatal or prolonged injuries but rather minimizes the possibility of injury or damage. Despite this definition, data and research indicate that the TASER does not generally cause prolonged effects, injuries or fatalities. (TASER, 2005).

A vast number of news articles, not always unbiased, citing individual instances in which police deployed a TASER are available by searching the Internet. New articles appear almost daily. Also available are articles citing studies of the TASER, departmental purchases of TASERs, and various organizations praising or condemning the TASER. The website [www.lineofduty.com](http://www.lineofduty.com) is an excellent source for up-to-date TASER-related news stories from around the country. The author found a plethora of information by sorting through TASER-related news stories linked to the website. One of those articles, provided by WKYT-TV in Lexington, KY, reported that attendees at the 2005 Sheriff’s National Conference held in Louisville, KY praised the use of TASERs as a non-lethal tool for law enforcement officers. The sheriffs stressed, though, that officers who use the TASER must be sufficiently trained before including it in their

arsenal of force options ("Sheriffs," 2005). *Men's News Daily* online offered an article that concurred with the sheriff's, citing that it is imperative that any officer who has the TASER at his/her disposal be properly trained in the safe use of the device. (Kouri, 2005). Not surprisingly, the weapon manufacturer also warns that the TASER should not be used until required departmental training is completed. (TASER, 2005).

Training must include not only *how* to deploy the device but also *when* it is appropriate to deploy the device, according to Bruce Bogan, a lawyer who has been employed to represent several law enforcement agencies in cases involving TASER use in Florida ("Sheriffs," 2005). Additionally, Bogan says departments authorizing officers to use the TASER must develop a policy that places the TASER in the force continuum. Recognizing that training and policy development are extremely important in the continued success of TASER use among law enforcement officers, the president of the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police, Louis M. Dekmar issued a statement in a quarterly association newsletter announcing that he has commissioned a committee to develop a model policy for use of TASERs within Georgia's law enforcement agencies (Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police [GACP], 2005). The subsequent report concluded that the Georgia Bureau of Investigation should continue to monitor and compile information regarding in-custody deaths and that the Georgia Peace Officers Standards and Training Council should require law enforcement officers in the state who carry and use a TASER to receive standardized training and certification. (Purser, 2005).

One of the most important issues surrounding use of the TASER is whether the device is safe. Amnesty International (2004) has voiced concern that since 2001, at



least 70 people in the USA and Canada “are reported” to have died after being shot by TASERS. The article acknowledges that coroners have attributed most, if not all, of those deaths to factors other than the TASER but suggests that experts in the medical field have questioned whether the TASER might have adverse effects on the heart of someone who is agitated, experiencing the effects of drug use, or who might suffer from existing heart or other health complications. (Amnesty International, 2004). The Department of Defense study (2005) concluded that overall, the TASER M26 and X26, when used as intended, will generally result in the desired effect with a low probability of unintended effects. Similarly, the Potomac study cited that research tests offered scientific evidence that utilization of stun guns is relatively safe. The study further concluded that when stun gun technology is administered properly, it is relatively safe and unquestionably effective. (McBride & Tedder, 2005).

Regarding the question of the TASER’s effectiveness, the device prevents officers from having to engage in physical fighting with suspects they are attempting to arrest, as quoted by police Sgt. Lauri Williams (agency not identified) and reported in a CBS News interview (Rather & Andrews, 2004). Many officers and law enforcement agencies support the use of TASERS and are thankful they have the non-lethal option. In Massachusetts, however, law enforcement officers are banned from carrying stun guns. Springfield, MA Police Chief Paula C. Meara explained that a TASER will aid in subduing suspects because it “puts them on the ground” (Associated Press, 2004). Chief Meara said the suspect is not subjected to suffering and does not sustain any permanent damage. She added that because of the use of TASERS, police officers are subjected to injuries less often. William Newman, a lawyer in Northampton, MA and the

director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Western Regional office, said TASER use should be monitored closely but acknowledged that the TASER is undoubtedly a beneficial tool for the police and for the people they serve (Associate Press, 2004). Lieutenant David Ogden, supervisor of the training division for Orange County Sheriff's Office in Orlando, Florida, commented that the TASER helps reduce the number of incidents in which law enforcement officers are required to resort to deadly force. ("Sheriff's," 2005).

As with any mechanical device, however, failures will occur. The United Kingdom's Police Scientific Development Branch stated that the TASER is not always 100% effective, citing that if only one barb successfully strikes the target or if the target is wearing thick clothing, the desired results might not be achieved (PSDB, 2002). Even TASER, International acknowledges that no weapon, tool, or technique is always 100% effective and that other options and alternatives should be considered in the event TASER deployment is ineffective. (TASER, 2005).

In almost every piece of literature reviewed, more study in this field is suggested. Edward Jackson, spokesman for Amnesty International, wants more medical research conducted to determine level of risk represented if the TASER is used on children, the elderly, and pregnant women. ("Sheriff's," 2005). Similarly, the participants in the Potomac study strongly recommended further research into what effects the TASER has "at the organism, organ, tissue, and cell levels" (McBride & Tedder, 2005, p. 5). Some department administrators across the nation have taken a cautious position and have stated that they want to see more research on the use of TASERs before allowing their officers to use them. Additional studies are being conducted, such as a study by

Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center. The results of that study are not expected to be released until the summer of 2006. (Wake Forest, 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Is the TASER a safe and effective force option for law enforcement officers? That is the question this research intends to study. From personal experience and limited knowledge gained prior to conducting this research, the author concludes that TASERs are safe and unquestionably effective. The author is aware of a plethora of news reports in print media and television media that call into question the safety of the TASER after a subject has died at some point after being shot with a TASER, but there are usually follow-up news stories that acknowledge that a medical examiner has ruled something other than the TASER was the cause of death. There have been one or more coroners, though, that have concluded the TASER was a contributing factor in the death. These cases are the reason some agency heads are reluctant to adopt the TASER as a force option and the reason for this research study.

One of the methods used by the author to obtain information for this research is a written survey provided to 24 officers who hold supervisory roles in various departments across the state of Texas. All 24 surveys were completed and returned to the author. The results will provide information on the percentage of represented departments that utilize TASERs, whether documentation is required when an officer deploys the TASER, and whether statistical data is readily available regarding TASER deployment. The survey instrument also investigates whether, in the respondent's opinion, the TASER has been instrumental in preventing officer injuries, whether it has been used effectively to restrain suspect(s) when other force options might have caused injury, and whether

the responding officer's agency has experienced a suspect injury or death after the TASER was used. Additionally, the instrument inquires about the respondent's personal use of the TASER and offers the opportunity to provide any additional comments.

## FINDINGS

When a law enforcement officer faces hostile force against him or attempts to effect a lawful arrest or search, he/she is authorized to use the degree of force necessary to complete that task (Texas Penal Code, 2005-2006). Individual agencies generally specify a continuum of force authorized for officers within that department. The order within the range of authorized force might vary in some detail by agency, but most of them generally appear as the one in Table 1, which also notes the degree of potential injury that might be associated with that level of force.

**Table I. Use of Force Options, Police Department,  
City of Huntsville, TX, Directive 1.2**

<b>Use of Force Options</b>	
<u>Force used</u>	<u>Potential Injury</u>
Command presence	none
Verbal direction	none
Escort techniques	none to minor
TASER	none to minor
Chemical agents	none to minor
Pain compliance (joint, pressure points)	none to minor
Mechanical (strikes, blows)	minor to moderate
Impact weapons/munitions	minor to major
Deadly force	major to death

In this model, the TASER falls within the range of force options that have the potential for no injury to minor injury. It is similar to that of about 30 law enforcement

agencies that were the subject of an Amnesty International study, which found that TASERs are listed on the continuum after verbal commands or empty hand tactics but before batons or other impact weapons. (Amnesty International, 2004). The same study found that some law enforcement agencies authorize officers to deploy the TASER to overcome a subject's failure to comply with verbal commands (passive resistance), while others authorize officers to utilize the TASER when the subject offers physical, defensive resistance but makes no attempt to injure the officer. There is no nationally standardized policy regarding the placement of the TASER in the force continuum, but rather the choice is left up to individual agency leaders.

There is no dispute that the TASER has the potential for minor injury, as indicated in the model in Table 1. Anytime a suspect is combative and must be restrained, the officer and the suspect are exposed to a potential for injury. Even the manufacturer acknowledges and cautions that there is some inherent risk when applying any use of force option, including the TASER. The referenced TASER bulletin (2005) lists an extensive number of potential scenarios whereby a target might incur injury indirectly when the TASER is utilized. TASER International warns against using the device on a target that is exposed to flammable materials. The company also warns that because the effects of the TASER might cause the subject to fall, there is a certain amount of risk for fall-related injuries.

In the report commissioned by the president of the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police, the study lists the nine effects experienced by a person shocked with a TASER (GACP, 2003, p. 3): falling immediately to the ground; freezing in place (involuntary muscle contractions) during the discharge of current; yelling, screaming, or

being silent; feeling dazed for several seconds or minutes; temporary tingling sensation; lack of any memory or sensation of pain; slight signature marks that resemble surface burns on the skin that may appear red or blister; eye injury from probe contact; and secondary injuries caused by falling. The Georgia study refers to the TASER as “non-deadly” because it is “extremely unlikely to cause death or serious injury” (GACP, 2005, p. 3, footnotes).

Despite the “non-deadly” moniker, Amnesty International contends that since 2001, at least 70 people in the USA and Canada reportedly died after being shot by TASERs. The report does acknowledge, however, that coroners conducting autopsies on the decedents have ruled that factors *other* than the TASER likely caused the deaths. Experts in the medical field have suggested, however, that the effects of the TASER might cause the subject to be more susceptible to a risk of heart failure if he/she is in a drug-induced state or has a history of heart problems. (Amnesty International, 2004).

The Arizona Journal reported in a December 24, 2004 article by Robert Anglen that 84 deaths have been recorded since 1999 after the decedent was subjected to the TASER. (Means, 2005). Medical examiners linked 11 of those cases to the TASER as being a “cause, a contributing factor, or could not be ruled out in someone’s death” (Means, 2005 as cited in the Arizona Journal). Based on approximations that the TASER has been applied 62,000 times in the field and 100,000 times in training of law enforcement and corrections officers, with 11 deaths being in some manner linked to the TASER, the calculated death rate is an extremely low 0.000067 percent. (Means, 2005).

There is no technology currently available that is absolutely devoid of risk, even with pieces of equipment or mechanisms that are specifically designed to save lives. (McBride & Tedder, 2005). Over the past few years, the news media has covered accounts of incidents in which even seat belts and air bags have been ruled as causative factors in deaths. To determine whether a device is “safe,” one must look at the big picture—the vast number of uses of the device—rather than focus on a relatively few cases that have ended with adverse consequences.

Considering the TASER’s effectiveness, Phoenix (AZ) Police Department’s officer involved shootings dropped by 54% in a one year period between 2002 and 2003 after the TASERs were introduced (Amnesty International, 2004). During the same time frame, fatal shootings dropped by 31%. Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon touted, “I am proud that Phoenix is the first city in the nation to equip all of our police officers with TASERs. We are committed to providing our officers with the latest technology, support, and equipment that they need in order to protect them and the community” (Amnesty International, 2004, Sec. 1.3, para. 10). Comparatively, Lt. David Ogden, supervisor of the training division for Orange County Sheriff’s Office in Orlando, Florida, commented that the TASER helps reduce the number of incidents in which law enforcement officers are required to resort to deadly force. (“Sheriffs,” 2005). Pointing to the effectiveness of the TASER, Springfield, MA Police Chief Paula C. Meara explained that a TASER will aid in subduing suspects because it “puts them on the ground” (Associated Press, 2004, para. 4). The Potomac study (2005) concluded that the TASER is indisputably effective because it renders the muscles momentarily inoperable.

In a public forum discussion including TASER International Chief Executive Officer Rick Smith and Amnesty International's Executive Director Bill Schultz on March 9, 2005, Schultz told Smith that it was not Amnesty International's contention that the TASER "causes" death. Schultz clarified that Amnesty International's concern is that the device may have been a contributing factor in a number of deaths that occurred after it was used. In the discussion, Schultz indicated that there was no doubt that the TASER is effective in that it saves lives. Smith cited information indicating that Amnesty International has acknowledged that in at least 574 cases documenting utilization of the TASER, its deployment probably resulted in lives being saved and injuries being prevented. TASER International estimates that the number of lives saved by use of the TASER is substantially greater, much greater than 6000. ("Department," 2005).

One of the major concerns of opponents of the TASER relates to fear of misuse and abuse of the device. Critics argue that because the device is portable, is capable of inflicting pain, and generally leaves no marks, the potential for abuse by corrupt officers is very high. To counter that claim, however, TASERs are equipped with on-board data recorders that document various pieces of information relating to each discharge. Amnesty International does not believe those safeguards are sufficient (Amnesty International, 2004).

Two recurring themes in the research material involved the need for departmental policies outlining the appropriate use of the TASER and proper training of officers who will carry or use the TASER. Training officers when the use of the TASER is appropriate—and, more importantly, when it is not—is vital to the public's acceptance of the device. Lawyer Bruce Bogan, representing several law enforcement agencies,



says departments with TASERs must develop a policy to establish when officers are authorized to deploy that force option. In a survey conducted by the U.S. General Accountability Office (Kouri, 2005), all of the law enforcement agencies contacted have guidelines in their policies regarding the use of the TASER and specific operational procedures and safeguards that must be observed. Officials at the agencies studied concur that proper training for officers authorized to carry and use TASERs is absolutely necessary. (Kouri, 2005).

Kansas City, Missouri's Board of Police Commissioners voted in June 2004 decided to tighten up the policy on TASER use after a large number of deployments in the first month after they were assigned to officers. The new policy authorizes Kansas City officers to deploy the TASER only after a suspect actively resists an officer, as opposed to the previous policy that allowed TASER deployment for passively resistant suspects. The decision also came on the heels of a particular incident that caused the public to voice their concern. The president of the board, Karl Zobrist, acknowledged that the TASER has stirred up some public controversy and asserted that the board is interested in ensuring that the TASERs are used when appropriate. Zobrist added that people need to understand that TASERs save lives. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, South Carolina PD Captain Mike Campagna reported that the agencies use of batons and pepper spray are on the decline, as are officer injuries. (Shultz, 2004).

San Jose, California Police Chief Rob Davis said his department would start collecting data from use of TASERs mid-2004 after the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People made a request for such data. Rick Callendar, NAACP president of the San Jose/Silicone Valley Chapter, voiced his concern that

minorities were the target of the TASER at an unfairly high rate. Callendar wanted to ensure that officers were not abusing the use of TASERs, and Chief Davis agreed to compile the information for study. (San Jose Mercury News, 1004).

A Miami-Dade County grand jury in January 2005 without hesitation “strongly” recommended that more police departments use the TASER, especially when apprehending violent mental patients. Their report concluded that stun technology is an effective alternative to deadly force in crisis situations. The panel was aware of TASER incidents that resulted in the target’s death, but they acknowledged that research indicates those deaths were attributed to other factors—not the TASER. The grand jury boldly stated that they believe TASERs save lives (Sun Sentinal.com, 2005).

In a survey conducted by the author (Appendix 1), 52% of the respondents were employed by agencies with fewer than 50 officers. Roughly 9% were employed with agencies made up of 51-100 officers. Just over 17% of the responding officers’ agencies have 101-200 officers, and almost 22% were employed by agencies with 201 or more officers. (See Figure 1.)

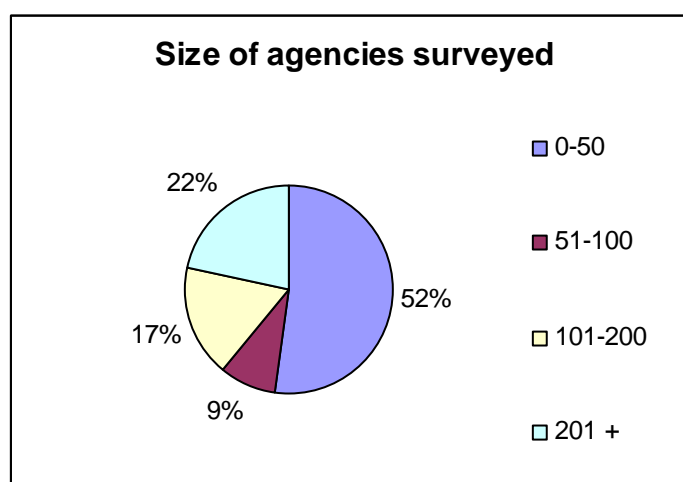
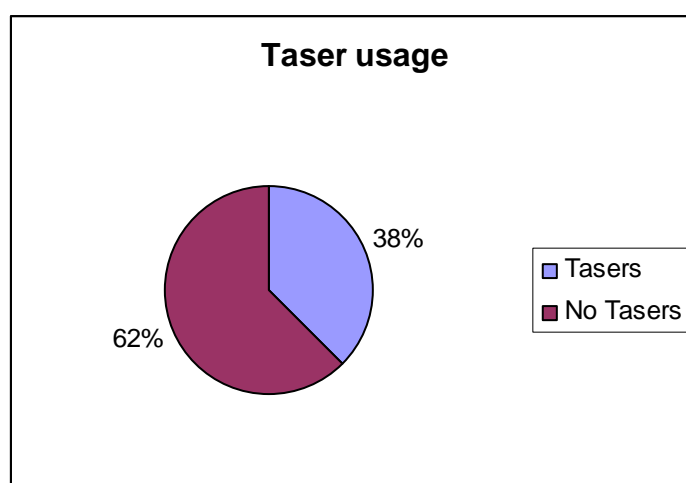


Figure 1. Size of agencies surveyed.

Of the 24 officers surveyed in the author's study, only 38% are employed by agencies that allow the use of TASERs (see Figure 2). It is important to note that 12.5% of the officers surveyed reported that their agencies are currently evaluating whether to implement or continue use of the TASERs.



**Figure 2. Surveyed agencies that use TASERs.**

All of those agencies that authorize the TASER require documentation when officers deploy it as a force option. The survey did not seek information regarding how that policy is followed. Of the nine agencies surveyed that use the TASER, 100% of those agencies require documentation of TASER deployments. 89% of those agencies keep readily available statistics regarding results of TASER deployments. 89% of the respondents reported that the device has been used successfully to subdue a suspect, and the overwhelming consensus from respondents whose agency uses the TASER (89%) indicated that officers AND suspects have been spared injury because the TASER was deployed rather than another force option.

**Table 11. Survey results**

Agencies reporting that stats are readily available	89%
Respondents who believe TASERs have prevented injuries to officers and suspects	89%
Agencies that have used TASER to successfully subdue suspect	89%
Agencies reporting in-custody or post-custody deaths involving TASER	0%
Agencies that require training before officer can carry TASER	100%

The officers responding to the author's survey contended that the TASER is an effective tool for law enforcement. One officer wrote in a section provided for comments, "As part of training...I've been hit with [the TASER]. I think it is an effective tool," he continued, "and I wish our department would get more serious in their consideration of them."

Jeff Turnbull, a Lieutenant with the Potter County (TX) Sheriff's Office, was recently certified as a TASER instructor. In a recent interview (J. Turnbull, personal communication, July 22, 2005), Lt. Turnbull explained that he subjected himself to being shot with a TASER during his training and can attest to the effect the device had on him. Furthermore, Turnbull witnessed the application of the TASER on approximately 30 other officers during the training course. According to Turnbull, no injuries were sustained by any of the volunteer participants, other than very minor puncture wounds from the barbs. Those minor injuries were treated with an alcohol swab and did not even bleed. Although Turnbull has not personally deployed the TASER in the field, he is aware of an incident within his agency in which an officer did successfully deploy the TASER. Turnbull explained that two officers attempted to apprehend a suspect, who

became violent toward the officers. The officers stepped back, rather than engage the suspect in a physical fight and risk injury to officers and the suspect, and effectively deployed the TASER. Only after the TASER was utilized, the officers were able to successfully apprehend the suspect and avoid injury to themselves and to the suspect. Turnbull is not aware of any failures of the TASER within his agency. He lauded the TASER and affirmed that, based on his observations, experiences, and personal research, it is a safe and effective force option for law enforcement. Turnbull added that if an agency had to choose just one less-lethal weapon, he would recommend they choose the TASER.”

## **CONCLUSIONS**

For years, critics of law enforcement in the U.S. have called for police to develop less-lethal and non-lethal options for apprehending suspects. The purpose of this study was to look at one of those options—the TASER stun device. With the use of the TASER steadily on the rise, print, television, and radio media outlets have been covering stories related to the TASER. The vast majority of those stories, however, are produced after a suspect dies following apprehension by use of a TASER. Headlines have been quick to suggest that the TASER was a factor in the death, and civil rights and other activist groups rally behind those headlines. Interestingly, the same people that argue that the TASER could be responsible for many deaths suggest that the device could be misused by corrupt officials because often it leaves no substantial marks. So, if used properly, is the TASER a safe and effective force option for law enforcement officers?

Before beginning this research endeavor, the author hypothesized that the results would conclude that the TASER, when used appropriately, provides law enforcement officers with an excellent non-lethal force option. The author believed at the outset that the study would likely support that the TASER is a safe and effective tool for law enforcement.

The survey conducted by the author indicated, not to the author's surprise, that the TASER is considered a safe and effective tool in subduing suspects and reducing officer injuries. The survey, as well as the research, suggests that keeping statistics regarding the use of the weapon is a common practice. In all fairness, the author acknowledges that the limited number of survey participants likely do not provide sufficient data for scientific conclusions, but the results seem to coincide with national information. The majority of police officers who have used the TASER agree that it is an effective tool to subdue a violent individual. The fact that TASER-use incidents very rarely result in even minor injury makes it an appealing choice for police. The author understands that there is the potential for misuse of the tool, the same potential that exists with any weapon—lethal or non-lethal. Proper training, departmental policy, mandatory documentation, and appropriate supervisory review of TASER deployments should keep instances of misuse to a minimum. When those instances are discovered and substantiated, appropriate disciplinary action is essential to develop and maintain the public trust.

Officers who are allowed to carry the TASER should be required to participate in approved training that includes instruction regarding when the TASER should and should not be deployed. Development of a strong policy to backup that training and

provide written guidelines pertaining to use of the TASER is essential. The policy should include mandatory documentation of any use of the TASER on a stand-alone form in addition to documentation in any incident/offense reports generated. The author believes departmental officials would find it beneficial to keep readily retrievable computerized statistical data to easily track TASER use incidents.

The research findings tend to support the author's hypothesis. Other studies reviewing the TASER concluded that it is a relatively safe and undeniably effective force option, despite critics calls for a halt to police use of the device. The author found that coroners conducting autopsies on subjects who were stunned and subsequently died in most cases ruled that the cause of death was something other than the TASER, but they cited the TASER as a contributing factor in several cases. Several studies reviewed in this research suggested further, more detailed study of the TASER, and the author fully supports that suggestion.

In addition to the results of the research, the author is able to draw on his own experiences with the TASER. The author has undergone training to authorize him to carry the TASER in his capacity as a police officer. During the training, the author volunteered to experience the effects of the M26 TASER. For training purposes, one probe was placed on his left waist and the other probe was placed in his right sock. With two other officers standing on either side of the author, another officer administered a 2-second jolt of electricity with the TASER rendering the author immediately helpless and on the ground. After it was all over, the author suffered no lingering effects.

In the author's second TASER experience, a fellow officer successfully deployed the TASER after a 6'5, 300 pound man hyped up on PCP struck the author after he instructed the man to get out of the street. The author, realizing that a physical struggle with the man would certainly result in injuries to him and/or the suspect, elected to disengage and call for a nearby officer with the TASER. The officer arrived quickly and deployed the TASER, effectively dropping the suspect to the ground. Other officers then assisted the author in taking the suspect into custody. The suspect continued to struggle after the first five second jolt, and a second was administered, allowing the suspect to finally be handcuffed. The most notable result of this encounter is the fact that neither the officers nor the suspect were injured, and the suspect was successfully, effectively taken into custody.

The results of this study, and others like it, should provide a resource to law enforcement executives who are considering the acquisition of TASERs for their agencies. Chiefs and Sheriffs might be apprehensive because of the high profile stories associating TASERs with in-custody or post-custody deaths, but it is worthy to note that almost any force option other than command presence or verbal commands have the potential for some type of injury. Some assurance can be found in the fact that hundreds of thousands of TASER shocks have been administered in training and in the field and, as of this writing, none have been the direct cause in any of the relatively few deaths reported after TASER deployment. Police chiefs and sheriffs should also ensure that officers are properly trained and that policies are in effect outlining the proper procedures for using the TASER. The line supervisors must be diligent in ensuring that incidents are properly documented and monitoring TASER deployments.



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## **APPENDIX 1**

### *City of Huntsville Police Department Directive 1.2*

#### **Use of Force Options**

<b>Force Used</b>	<b>Potential Injury</b>
Command Presence	None
Verbal Direction	None
Escort Techniques	None to Minor
Chemical Agents	None to Minor
Pain Compliance (Joint, Pressure Points)	None to Minor
TASER	Minor to Moderate
Mechanical (Strikes, Blows)	Minor to Moderate
Impact Weapons (Asp Baton)	Minor to Major
Deadly Force	Major to Death

## APPENDIX 2

### Survey Instrument for Administrative Research Paper Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas Leadership Command College

1. How many officers does your department employ?  
\_\_\_ Under 50    \_\_\_ 51-100    \_\_\_ 101-200    \_\_\_ 201 or more
2. What is the population of your jurisdiction?  
\_\_\_ Under 15,000    \_\_\_ 15,001 - 50,000    \_\_\_ 50,001 – 100,000    \_\_\_ 100,001 +
3. Does your department authorize officers to carry Tasers?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
4. Does your department document Taser deployment?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
5. Does your department keep readily available statistical data related to Taser deployment?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
6. Has any officer in your department avoided injury because a Taser was deployed?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
7. Has the Taser been used effectively to restrain a suspect or suspects when other force options likely would have caused injury?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
8. a. Has your department experienced any in-custody deaths of suspects on which a Taser was used?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No  
b. If “yes” to Part a, did a Medical Examiner rule that the deployment of the Taser was a contributing factor to the death?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
9. Have you personally deployed a Taser to effect an arrest?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
10. a. Did the suspect sustain any injury in that incident?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No  
b. If “yes” to Part a, describe the severity of the injury.  
    \_\_\_ minor (treated at scene or jail)  
    \_\_\_ major (required emergency care)  
    \_\_\_ death

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Survey Instrument Supplement

1. Does your agency require officers to undergo training before authorized to use the Taser?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

2. What level of training is required?

\_\_\_\_\_ 4 hours (Taser-recommended)

\_\_\_\_\_ 8 hours

\_\_\_\_\_ other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)

(Please return to David O'Rear)