



MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable Gene Ricciardi, President
Honorable Members of City Council

From: Elizabeth C. Pittinger, Executive Director

Date: February 9, 2005

Re: Update to TASER Briefing issued Spring 2004

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This update is provided in response to a request by Councilman Udin on February 1, 2005, for consideration by Council on February 9, 2005. Please be advised that the following reflects the opinion of the Executive Director, as the Citizen Police Review Board will not meet until February 22, 2005, at which time they will review and determine appropriateness for release as an official Board position.

In the Spring of 2004 the CPRB issued a briefing on TASER use and supported TASER's implementation as a less lethal force alternative by the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police (PBP). A copy of that report is attached for your reference.

http://www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/cprb/assets/04_CPRB_Summary_TASER_Deployment.pdf

The PBP acquired 150 TASER (M26) units and began to deploy them late in 2004. Policies & procedures related to the Use of Force and specifically, governing the use of TASER, were issued by the PBP early in January 2005.

In the original report, we emphasized the lack of conclusive research on the effects of TASER M26 on humans; the effects are simply not known to any degree of certainty. Such remains the case today, however, numerous research projects have been undertaken to establish the effect of electro-muscular disruption (EMD) imposed by electrical devices such as TASER. The National Institute of Justice has awarded grants to five specific research projects to study the human effects of EMD Technology (list attached for your information).

During the period between June 1999 December and 2004, at least 84 deaths in which TASER was involved have been reported in the United States and Canada. These deaths have raised serious questions about the safety of TASER and the contributory role TASER may have had in those deaths.

In response to these reported deaths, Amnesty International (AI) issued a report on November 30, 2004 calling for a suspension of TASER use until the human effects are well established. A copy of the relevant press release by AI is attached for your information.

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr511392004>

As background to this update, I reviewed reports from various sources of all 84 deaths in which TASER was used. A copy of the summary information table I prepared is attached for your information.

It would seem that there is a connection between the death of individuals who are physiologically compromised by drugs or medical condition and TASER, however, fewer than ten inquiries mention

TASER as a contributing factor, and then so with ambivalence. Generally, post-autopsy discussions render equivocal impressions regarding TASER.

With the exception of one or two individuals, none of the others appeared “healthy” or drug-free. Many deaths followed a significant struggle, or observed agitated state. Many are attributed to “excited delirium” in which the person’s bio-chemistry is influenced by the presence of an intoxicant, notably cocaine. Many were in-custody deaths following multiple TASER applications. Some suggest that positional asphyxia was involved.

Consider that cocaine is known to affect cardiac rhythm and respiratory functions. It is possible that a TASER hit on a cocaine intoxicated person coincided with the recycling of the heart, throwing the heart into abnormal rhythms. Such would appear as cardiac arrest, impossible at this time to say with certainty that the TASER caused the event. Or consider the effect of multiple TASER hits interfering with respiration cycles, the person can’t catch their breath – the multiplicity extends the duration of breathlessness – the lack of oxygen affects the cardiac rhythm, the person dies. Death investigation will reflect cardiac arrest – no certainty as to TASER involvement.

The above are examples of the potential results of a product entering the market without adequate research on human effects. If TASER were a medical device, it would not have entered the market without FDA approval, following extensive research and evaluation of human effects. Nonetheless, TASER is available, is in use, and has undoubtedly saved lives, and reduced injuries to citizens and officers.

Our current dilemma is whether to continue to deploy TASER in Pittsburgh or to suspend use of TASER until more information is available as to the human effects of TASER.

In good conscience, I cannot recommend suspension of TASER at this time. It has proven to be an effective and safer alternative to hard impact, K-9, less lethal munitions and deadly force. That is not to minimize the impact of the deaths of several people following exposure to TASER. The uncertainty of the connection is deeply disturbing, but the circumstances of those deaths suggest too many variables to preclude use of a device that - while violent in application - offers a generally more expedient and safer alternative to traditional police control techniques.

The practical issue is the manner in which officers use the TASER, and that is the product of training and policy permissiveness.

Generally, the PBP policy regarding TASER is reasonable and provides for immediate medical assessment of any person subjected to TASER incapacitation. Training and re-certification of officers appears adequate.

In the course of reviewing information for this update, I considered an alternative device soon to be available, the Stinger, produced by Stinger Systems. The introduction of this product put some competition into the market for TASER and lawsuits quickly emerged. Stinger offers a trade-in deal which appears lucrative (we could save close to \$75,000 if we traded our current TASER units and acquired all 210 from Stinger). The Stinger purports to have a longer range of effectiveness, has a side-mounted video cam for documentation of discharges, and delivers a no-load charge of 17,500 volts (less

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than TASER 50,000, but no proof of it being safer). However, as I understand it, no unit has yet been shipped. I do not recommend switching to the Stinger device. (<http://www.stingersystems.com/>)

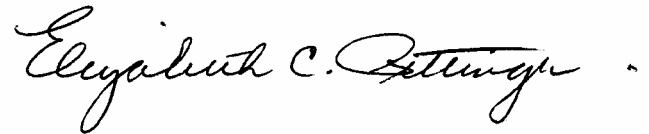
As a result of the Stinger dispute, the death reports, questionable incentives offered to police, and alleged insider trading, TASER suffered a significant downturn in market trading in the last half of 2004. It appears that they have recovered and their viability as a continuing provider of product and support is reasonably certain.

Conclusion:

As noted in our previous report, we cannot train officers in every possible scenario, neither can we expect them to be capable of diagnosing every individual they encounter prior to employing reasonable force to stop a threat to others or themselves.

The concerns and recommendations offered in the original report are unchanged and continued deployment of TASER by Pittsburgh Police officers under the strict training and monitoring required by PBP policy & procedures appears to serve the public interest.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elizabeth C. Pittenger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

Web Edition provides hyperlinks to referenced documents.

Table of deaths reviewed is published below.

NAME	AGE	GEND	DATE	STATE	COCAINE	Other Drug	MH	STRUGGLE	Death/Heart	Excited Delirium	Positional Asphyxia	NOTE
FLORES	37	M	9/8/1999	CA	YES	METH	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
OCHOA	34	M	5/4/2000	CA	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	BLUNT TRAUMA
BURKETT	18	M	6/17/2001	FL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	PARA SCHIZ	YES	YES	YES/MANIA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
ROGERS-GRIPP	6 Mo Fetus	F	12/15/2001	CA	NO	MOTHER-METH	NO	NO	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
HENDRIX	27	M	12/17/2001	OH	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES-EMS	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
VASQUEZ	40	M	12/21/2001	FL	UNKNOWN	PAIN MED	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
DELOSTIA	31	M	1/27/2002	FL	YES	UNKNOWN	HX-BI	YES	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
SPENCER	35	M	2/12/2002	PA	YES	OC	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
CANADY	46	M	3/27/2002	FL	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	HX CAD
BARALLA	36	M	5/17/2002	CO	UNKNOWN	OC	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
UNKNOWN	39	M	6/1/2002	AR	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
ALVARADO	32	M	6/10/2002	CA	YES	METH	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 5X
NICHOLS	20	M	6/15/2002	OK	UNKNOWN	TRACE THC	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	HEAD INJURY
RINCON	24	M	6/27/2002	CA	UNKNOWN	METH	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
CRAIG	46	M	6/28/2002	AL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X (40 SEC)
LOZOYA	UNK	M	7/19/2002	CA	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	HOSPITAL
JONES	37	M	7/19/2002	FL	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	YES (?)	YES	TAS 2X
WEBBER	44	M	9/1/2002	FL	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
EDWARDS	59	M	11/7/2002	WA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	DIABETES/OBESITY
UNKNOWN	31	M	3/16/2003	NM	YES	AMP/ALC/O.C.	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	BATON/TAS/OC
HOLLANDER	22	M	5/10/2003	CA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS/BEAN/PILE/OC
SLEET	44	M	6/9/2003	MO	UNKNOWN	PCP/OC	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X, HEART DIS
WILLEY	33	M	7/22/2003	BC CAN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
NOWELL	51	M	8/4/2003	TX	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
THOMPSON	45	M	8/8/2003	MI	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 3X
RAUCH	39	M	8/17/2003	CA	UNKNOWN	PSYCHOTROPIC	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
HANNA	51	M	8/19/2003	BC CAN	YES ?	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	??	Suicide Threat
WHITEHOUSE	34	M	9/1/2003	YUK CAN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 5X/BEANS
AUSTIN	25	M	9/24/2003	GA	UNKNOWN	PSYCHOTROPIC	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
LEYBA	37	M	9/29/2003	CO	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	YES	??	TAS MUL
PIERSON	40	M	10/7/2003	CA	UNKNOWN	METH	UNKNOWN	YES	CAD	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
HAMMOND	31	M	10/11/2003	OK	UNKNOWN	METH	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 5X/BEANS
MORRIS	50	M	10/21/2003	FL	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	YES	??	UNKNOWN
BORDEN	47	M	11/6/2003	IN	REPEATED	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
JOHNSON	32	M	11/10/2003	OK	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	CHF	YES	UNKNOWN	TAS X5
O'BRIEN	31	M	11/11/2003	FL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN
KING	39	M	12/9/2003	FL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	YES	TAS 2X
LAWSON	40	M	12/9/2003	GA	YES	OC	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	HX ENLARGE	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
GLOWCZENSKI	35	M	2/4/2004	NY	UNKNOWN	OC	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
SIEGLER	40	M	2/12/2004	MN	UNKNOWN	ALCOHOL	YES	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
LOMAX	26	M	2/21/2004	NV	UNKNOWN	PCP	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS X7 (model X26)
ROSTENGALE	44	M	2/21/2004	WA	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
RONALD	28	M	2/23/2004	ACB CAN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
WILLIAMS	45	M	3/28/2004	IL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
SAMUEL	28	M	4/16/2004	GA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	HOG TIED
WOLLE	45	M	4/27/2004	MD	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	BI-XCHIZ	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
ANDREICHIK	UNK	M	5/1/2004	BC CAN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
LAMONDAY	38	M	5/13/2004	ONT CAN	YES	OC	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
WILLIAMS	31	M	5/27/2004	GA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	SEIZURE	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 5X
SMITH	46	M	5/30/2004	GA	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	YES	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
PICKENS	55	M	6/4/2004	LA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	FELL
CHRISTMAS	36	M	6/4/2004	OH	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
COBB	42	M	6/9/2004	MN	UNKNOWN	OC	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MULTI/BATON
LAIR	26	M	6/9/2004	NV	UNKNOWN	METH/OC	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
BAGNELL	44	M	06/23/2004	BC CAN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
LIEBERMAN	32	M	6/24/2004	PA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
SMITH	48	M	7/11/2004	WA	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
KNIGHT	29	M	7/17/2004	ONT CAN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	YES	YES	UNKNOWN
SALAZAR	29	M	7/23/2004	ARIZ	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
TUCKER	47	M	8/2/2004	NV	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL + Baton
TRUSCOTT	43	M	8/8/2004	ONT CAN	UNKNOWN	OC ?	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
RILEY	41	M	8/11/2004	MO	HOUSE EX	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
BLACKWELL	29	M	8/11/2004	MO	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
MCDONALD	46	M	8/13/2004	NC	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X/BEANS
TEASLEY	31	M	8/16/2004	SC	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	TAS CON	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
KARLO	44	M	8/19/2004	CO	YES	ANTI-DEP	YES	YES	HX DIS	YES	UNKNOWN	TAS 4X (Brain Damage 2003)
SANDERS	40	M	8/20/2004	CA	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS MUL
DAVIS	27	M	8/24/2004	ARIZ	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 3X + Chokehold
YEAGLEY	32	M	8/27/2004	FL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
ROSA	38	M	8/29/2004	CA	UNKNOWN	METH	UNKNOWN	YES	TAS CON	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
WAKEFIELD	22	M	09/12/2004	TX	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
WASHINGTON	21	M	9/15/2004	CA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
MERKLE	40	M	9/20/2004	FL	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
DUNN	33	M	10/4/2004	LA	UNKNOWN	ALCOHOL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X

NAME	AGE	GEND	DATE	STATE	COCAINE	Other Drug	MH	STRUGGLE	Death/Heart	Excited Delirium	Positional Asphyxia	NOTE
GUERRERO	21	M	11/2/2004	TX	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
GRAY	25	M	11/2/2004	GA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	ENLARGED	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 3X
ZARAGOZA	40	M	11/8/2004	CA	UNKNOWN	OC	PARA SCHIZ	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
KEISER	47	M	11/25/2004	MI	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 3X
BLACK	39	M	11/27/2004	FL	UNKNOWN	OC	SEIZURE	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
FLEMING	35	M	12/4/2004	LA	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
DOWNING	36	M	12/15/2004	FL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
MELDRUM	37	M	12/17/2004	UT	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X
NELSON	35	M	12/17/2004	IL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 1X
BOLANDER	31	M	12/23/2004	FL	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	YES	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	TAS 2X