TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER DEPARTMENT: POLICE

DATE: FEBRUARY 4, 2008 CMR:130:08

SUBJECT: TASER QUARTERLY REPORT

This is an informational report and no Council action is needed at this time.

DISCUSSION:

On May 7, 2007, City Council approved the expenditure of Citizens Options for Public Safety (COPS) funds (CMR:234:07) for the purchase of electronic control devices (TASERS), supplies, and training in accordance with the TASER Task Force study. At that time, staff committed to providing quarterly reports on the use of TASERS. This is the first report.

In July 2007, staff purchased 100 TASER X-26s equipped with the TASER-CAM system. The TASER-CAM is a digital audio/visual recording device which is affixed to the TASER X-26 and allows for greater accountability as it records the activation of the device. Data from the TASER-CAM is downloaded to a secure computer which stores deployments and activations.

Training

In September 2007, staff finalized the TASER policy (CMR:368:07) according to the models of the International Chiefs of Police, Police Executive Research Forum, the California Police Chiefs’ Association and current case law. The City Attorney and Independent Police Auditor reviewed the TASER policy and concurred with the contents.

Also in September, several of the Department’s Defensive Tactics Instructors attended the TASER instructor course as well as a number of other use-of-force courses. These instructors developed a course curriculum that all Palo Alto police officers attended and successfully completed prior to carrying the TASER. Topics included: nomenclature; TASER capabilities; Police Department TASER policy; use of force; excited delirium; crisis intervention techniques; and In-Custody death incident response. Additionally, officers went through a series of decision-making scenarios. Officers were evaluated in the performance of these scenarios and were required to complete and pass all phases of the training and written tests in order to be certified to carry the TASER. In all, the TASER training consisted of 17 hours of lecture, demonstration, exercise and scenario. Eight-five officers attended. Members of the City Council and the Human Relations Commission, as well as the Independent Police Auditor attended portions of this training.
Defensive tactics instructors provided comprehensive training to Palo Alto Fire Department paramedics and emergency medical technicians on the TASER, Police Department procedures and possible injuries that could result after a TASER application. Defensive tactics instructors also met with physicians and staff at Stanford Medical Center Emergency Room.

Deployments

On September 27, 2007, officers began carrying TASERS in the field. As a part of the reporting and accountability system, the Department tracks whenever a TASER is drawn and pointed at a subject (TASER deployment) as well as when a TASER is actually used (TASER activation). Any time that a TASER is deployed or activated, the officer is required to advise his/her supervisor and an entry is made into the Department’s Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Additionally, each officer’s TASER-CAM is inspected quarterly and the TASER data is reviewed quarterly to ensure all deployments and activations are reported. From September 27, 2007 through December 31, 2007, there were a total of seven TASER deployments and one TASER activation.

In the lone TASER activation, officers responded to a residence at the request of a mental health nurse from the Veteran’s Administration Hospital who was having difficulty placing a subject (white male, 66 years of age) on a mental hold. The subject had been deemed a “danger to others” and had made comments to witnesses that he wanted officers to shoot him. After the subject physically attacked one of the officers, the TASER was activated and the subject was subdued. He was then medically cleared at Stanford Emergency Room and transported to the VA Hospital for treatment for his mental health issues. The subject suffered no long-term physical effects from the TASER activation. A review of the incident revealed that the use of the TASER was appropriate and consistent with Department policy and case law. The Police Auditor reviewed the Department findings and TASER video and concurred with the Department’s conclusions.

In all other TASER deployments, the subjects complied with officers’ commands as soon as the TASER was pulled and pointed at them. This is exactly what staff had hoped for. The following are summaries of the TASER deployments that occurred between September 27, 2007 and December 31, 2007.

1.) Officers assisted the Mountain View Police Department in an attempt to take a violent parolee at-large into custody at a local motel. The officers deployed the TASER when the subject (Hispanic male adult) was taken into custody at a local hotel. The subject complied and was taken into custody.

2.) Officers responded to a call of a subject (White male adult) who was believed to be under the influence of a controlled substance who was walking down the middle of a street, shirtless with his pants down around his ankles. Officers arrived and gave the subject commands but he was non-compliant. The officers displayed the TASER and then took him into custody.
3.) Officers responded to a call of a subject (White male adult) who was annoying students at Palo Alto High School. Officers responded and located the subject. When officers gave the subject arrest commands, he refused to comply. An officer deployed the TASER “covering” another officer as he grabbed the suspect and took him into custody.

4.) An officer observed a subject (African-American male adult) weaving as he rode his bicycle down the street. Another officer attempted to detain the bicyclist but the subject refused to comply with the officers and began running away. After approximately two hundred yards, the subject changed direction and began running back toward the officer chasing him. The officer deployed her TASER and the subject immediately surrendered. He was taken into custody and charged with DUI on a bike.

5.) Officers responded to a person who was reportedly intoxicated. Officers arrived to find the subject (Asian male adult) staggering down the street and unable to care for himself. When the officers gave the subject commands, he refused to obey them. An officer deployed his TASER and the subject surrendered.

6.) A subject (White male adult) was being brought to the Stanford Emergency Room for a psychiatric evaluation as he was a danger to himself. Officers responded to the area after it was learned that the subject escaped as he was being brought to the ER. An officer observed the subject and gave him arrest commands. The subject refused to obey the commands and the officer deployed his TASER. Another officer arrived and the subject was taken into custody.

7.) Officers responded to a call of eight to nine subjects fighting at a hotel. Upon arrival the officers observed two subjects (Asian male adult and Hispanic male adult) engaged in a physical fight. An officer deployed his TASER and the subjects ceased attacking one another.

Staff will continue to monitor TASER deployments and activations and report to Council on a quarterly basis.

Council has received a number of newspaper articles from a few citizens that put the use of tasers in a very negative and critical light. Attached are two of numerous articles that demonstrate the value of tasers and how they actually save many lives.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT: Two Newspaper Articles
PREPARED BY:  

DENNIS BURNS  
Assistant Police Chief

DEPARTMENT HEAD:  

LYNNE JOHNSON  
Police Chief

CITY MANAGER APPROVAL:  

EMILY HARRISON  
Assistant City Manager