

ACPO Questions & Answers on Taser, 11 February 2013

Tweet < 84

The public are asking more questions now than ever before about the police use of Taser and what it means for policing and protecting the public.

There are many different views on it, and it is regularly debated and discussed in the media and across social media.

We believe it's important for the public to have the facts around Taser to help with that discussion, which is why we have drawn up a list of the most frequently asked questions for the public and media to use.

ACPO constantly reviews the guidance around Taser to ensure it remains fit for purpose and this Q&A will be updated as more issues arise.

- ACPO lead on armed policing, Deputy Chief Constable Simon Chesterman

When was Taser introduced?

In 2004, following a trial in five forces, it was agreed to allow chief officers of all police forces in England and Wales to make Taser available to authorised firearms officers.

In July 2007 authorised police firearms officers were allowed to use Taser in a greater set of circumstances. These officers are now able to deploy Taser in operations or incidents where the use of firearms is not authorised, but where they are facing violence or threats of violence of such severity that they would need to use force to protect the public, themselves or the subject.

It was also announced in July 2007 that the deployment of Taser by specially trained police units who are not firearms officers, but who are facing similar threats of violence, would be trialled in ten police forces.

The 12-month trial commenced on 1 September 2007 and finished on 31 August 2008. It took place in the following forces: Avon & Somerset, Devon & Cornwall, Gwent, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Metropolitan Police, Northamptonshire, Northumbria, North Wales and West Yorkshire.

Following the success of the trial, from 1 December 2008, Taser use was extended to specially trained units.

When can officers use Taser?

Taser may be deployed and used as one of a number of tactical options only after application of the [National Decision Model](#) (NDM).

When Taser, or any other force is used on an individual, a police officer will always have to justify their actions as being necessary and proportionate under the Law.

All uses of Taser are reported to the Home office in great detail, including those where young people are involved.

Is every police officer given a Taser?

No.

Every chief constable makes a decision, based on an assessment of the risks in their own area, to train and deploy a proportionate number of officers to use Taser so that the public are kept safe and their officers are protected as far as possible.

Every use of Taser is reported and scrutinised and officers are individually accountable to the law for the amount of force they use.

Why use Taser at all?

Taser provides an additional option to resolve situations, including the threat of violence, which can come from any section of the public.

In certain circumstances, the use of Taser is more appropriate than conventional firearms in resolving dangerous situations safely and without the risk of serious injury.

In addition, officers who are trained and equipped with Taser must decide on the most reasonable and necessary use of force in the circumstances.

The level of force used must be the minimum necessary to achieve the objective and officers are individually accountable in law for the amount of force they use on a person.

The alternatives to Taser include a range of other measures such as physical restraint, batons and police dogs. Much will depend upon the circumstances, but Taser will often be less injurious than resorting to baton strikes or deployment of a police dog.

In the majority of cases involving Taser, the mere threat of its use has been enough to deter assailants and ensure a peaceful resolution of the incident.

What happens to someone when Taser is used on them?

The normal reaction of a person exposed to the discharge of a Taser is the loss of some voluntary muscle control resulting in the subject falling to the ground or freezing on the spot.

Recovery from the direct effects of the Taser should be almost instantaneous, once the discharge is complete.

In addition to this, anyone who is arrested after being subjected to Taser is examined by a forensic medical examiner.

After Taser is used on someone, are the medical implications taken into account?

Yes.

The medical implications associated with Taser are closely monitored by an independent panel of medical advisers who also monitor the learning from across the world.

This enables ACPO to constantly review the guidance to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

In addition, the ACPO guidance is supported by a detailed training curriculum which is delivered to all Taser officers and refreshed annually.

Tasers have been called '50,000 volt stun guns'. Are people hit with 50,000 volts?

No.

It is not correct to say Tasers use 50,000 volts to stun people, that is not how they operate.

At the top of a Taser there are two contact points which need to link together. In order to do this, the Taser generates a highest peak voltage of 50,000 volts for less than a second to allow the arc jump a gap so the two contact points meet. The Taser also does this in incidents where a probe lodges in clothing and must jump the gap to the body.

When travelling across the human body, the peak voltage drops to 1,200 volts.

It should also be pointed out that volts are not dangerous.

The average current a Taser emits is 0.0021amps, which is less than the electrical current from a Christmas tree light bulb.

A Taser works not by power, but by the way it sends the current into the body and how the muscles respond. For example, the energy delivered per pulse is 0.07 joules compared to a cardiac defibrillator which typically delivers 150-400 joules per pulse, which is 2,000 to 5,000 times more powerful.

Is it true that police are going to introduce a new Taser called X2 in a few months time?

No.

The X2 is currently undergoing scientific assessment in the United States and the Home Office Centre for Applied Science and Technology is examining trials to determine if the X2 would be suitable for operational use in the UK.

The X2 would be subject to a raft of in depth and lengthy scientific and medical tests in the UK prior to deciding whether it was viable for use in policing here. The implementation of any new Taser would also need the approval of the Secretary of State before implementation.

Would the X2 be more powerful than the existing Taser?

No.

The X2 model is more sophisticated in that it measures every pulse and adjusts the charge according to how good the connection is, so in some cases it is even less powerful due to this advancement in technology.

It also offers an increased level of accountability as it records every occasion when the device is activated and whether the Taser made a connection with a subject. This compares with the Taser X26 currently used which only records time, date and duration of discharge. It cannot differentiate between a hit and miss.

How can police be confident the right amount of current comes out of a Taser?

The manufacturer carries out thorough tests on all of its Tasers, which are guaranteed by an internationally recognised quality assurance body to ensure they meet operational specifications before they are supplied.

Tasers are also checked to ensure they are functioning correctly.

If the current Taser works, why do we need a new one?

The police service is legally bound to explore alternatives to lethal force and continuously examines new technology to ensure if there are any developments which could be applied in UK policing .

The Taser X26 has been commercially available since 2003. As with all electronic devices, technology moves on and new models may offer significant advances in safety, use and accountability. All equipment has a realistic life expectancy and will require eventual replacement.

Simon Chesterman is the ACPO lead on armed policing and Deputy Chief Constable of [West Mercia Police](#).