



POLICE COMMITTEE MINUTES

September 12, 2006

The Police Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on September 12, 2006 at 3:33 p.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT	COMMITTEE ABSENT	STAFF PRESENT
Mike Whalen, Chairperson Kyle Jones Scott Somers	None	Debra Dollar

1. Hear a presentation and discuss Use of Force training, policies and procedures regarding TASERS.

Chairman Whalen welcomed Police Chief George Gascon to his first Police Committee Meeting.

Chief Gascon stated that he would provide a brief introduction and then Proficiency Skills Sergeant Lee White would provide an overview regarding TASERS, after which the Committee's questions could be addressed. He advised that the TASER, one of the most effective tools available to law enforcement, provides a humane way to address belligerent, combative suspects. He said that death or injury seldom results from the use of a TASER, and that when death or injury does occur, the suspect most likely had an underlying medical condition, had ingested a narcotic or was injured during a fall. Chief Gascon said that a goal of the department is to equip each officer with a TASER, and he noted that the Police Department's Use of Force Policy would emphasize the use of the TASER when a police officer or a citizen is threatened or when a suspect is combative rather than as a tool to gain compliance. He advised that the department's policy is based on national standards established by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), an organization that researches police practices and promulgates model policies. Chief Gascon explained that TASER use is limited to instances when an officer reasonably believes that he or she is confronted by an individual who intends to cause bodily harm to the officer or another individual. He advised that the department's policy does not advocate the use of a TASER when an officer is confronted by a suspect with a gun or knife, and he added that an officer might elect to utilize a TASER in that type of situation when a team is present to provide both lethal and less lethal options. Chief Gascon emphasized that the TASER would not replace the officer's gun, and he stated that the TASER is intended to be used to reduce the possibility of injury when a suspect is combative or is displaying the propensity to be combative. He noted that the new model of TASER is user friendly and not likely to be confused with a firearm.

Sergeant White displayed a PowerPoint presentation (a copy is available for review in the City Clerk's Office) to provide an overview of the TASER Program, and he advised that a TASER has "probe" and "contact" modes. He explained that the "probe" mode requires the attachment of a cartridge to the end of the TASER weapon, which propels compressed nitrogen probes up to 25 feet and utilizes electrical energy to override the suspect's central nervous system. Sergeant White added that officers have three methods that can be utilized to incapacitate a suspect: the TASER, a firearm and pain compliance. He said that regardless of media accounts to the contrary, the TASER's voltage is not harmful and enables electricity to pass through the body. Sergeant White further advised that although high amps could be harmful, TASERS utilize very low amps. He further advised that the high voltage enables the TASER to be effective and the low amps ensure that the weapon is safe.

Sergeant White said that the new TASER Model X26 can be deployed by "contact" with the cartridge attached, which is the preferred method of using the TASER. He added that use of the cartridge is recommended in all situations and that this procedure is emphasized in the training process. Sergeant White advised that this practice is also recommended by TASER International and several training organizations. He explained that officer training emphasizes that the TASER should not be used on suspects who may be very old or very young, pregnant women and suspects near water hazards or in elevated positions. Sergeant White stated that officer training includes simulations that reflect both the proper and improper use of the TASER.

In response to a series of questions from Committeemember Somers, Chief Gascon advised that the new Use of Force policy permits the use of the TASER when a suspect demonstrates aggressive, combative behavior and presents a credible threat. He said that current policy provides for utilizing the TASER at lower threat level, and he added that the new Use of Force policy raises that threshold to just below the threat level for use of firearms and at the same level as a baton. Chief Gascon reported that earlier Use of Force models were based on an escalating ladder and that new policies recognize the reality that a situation can progress to a level of deadly force in a matter of seconds. He advised that staff is presently reviewing the entire Use of Force policy beginning with the use of the TASER. Chief Gascon noted that he plans to reassess Use of Force training procedures and develop new reporting systems.

Sergeant White continued the presentation by displaying the current M26 model and the new X26 model. He noted that although the new X26 is smaller and uses less power, it is more effective than the M26. Sergeant White outlined the benefits of the Model X26 as follows:

- The unit is easier to carry (the X26 is carried on the patrol belt rather than in a thigh holster, which minimizes the possibility of the weapon being seized by a suspect).
- An internal battery enables a minimum of 200 deployments (the battery in the current model requires recharging at the end of each shift, battery replacement after six months and provides only 26 deployments).
- The unit provides downloaded data that is more accurate.
- A flashlight is integrated into the unit.
- The unit is sized differently and feels different from a handgun (officers are better able to determine which weapon is in hand during stressful situations).
- There is less possibility of injury during deployment when using the unit in the contact mode without the cartridge.

In reply to a question from Chairman Whalen, Chief Gascon advised that although contact use of the TASER without the cartridge is discretionary, the practice is strongly discouraged.

Responding to a question from Committeemember Jones, Sergeant White stated that the video option is an additional \$400 per unit, and therefore that feature is presently cost prohibitive. He added that he has utilized the video feature in a training situation and found the quality to be excellent.

Chief Gascon noted that disagreement exists in the law enforcement community regarding the effectiveness of the TASER's video feature. He explained that the video provides a narrow view of what is likely to be a multi-dimensional scenario.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that the video feature is not operable until the safety is disengaged; that activity occurring before that point in time is not recorded; and that the video technology requires refinement before the department would consider utilizing the feature.

Sergeant White advised that the department presently has 182 of the Model M26 and 11 of the Model X26 units. He reported that the Police Department's TASER training program includes ten hours of training for new officer certifications followed by two hours of training in each subsequent year for recertification. Sergeant White explained that Mesa's training includes written tests and reviews of the Use of Force and TASER policies, and he added that periodic training bulletins address legal issues and reinforce the policies. He noted that training has evolved over the years since the introduction of the TASER technology. Sergeant White further advised that incidents involving the TASER are reported to the Street Sergeant, who in turn provides a Use of Force report to the Training Office, which he reviews to determine whether changes are required to the training process or policies and whether the established procedures and policies are being followed. He noted that no major injuries to officers or suspects occurred in the past 18 months as a direct result of an officer using a TASER, and he stated that all other injuries to suspects that required medical attention in the 2005-2006 timeframe resulted from other means of force, such as impact weapons, dog bites, etc.

Sergeant White stated that the department plans to purchase 543 Model X26 TASER units, including a battery pack and holster, in order to equip every uniformed officer assigned to patrol operations, including warrant officers. He advised that the existing Model M26 TASER units will be reassigned to other officers not in uniform, such as the Criminal Investigations Unit, the Special Investigations Unit, and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) personnel.

Chief Gascon added that future policy will include clear direction and strict protocols regarding the provision of medical treatment whenever a TASER is utilized.

Committeemember Somers suggested that the Police Department coordinate with the Fire Department in order to determine the need for paramedic response when a TASER is utilized on a suspect. He advised that the City of Phoenix conducted a study of this issue, and he suggested that the Mesa Police Department contact Phoenix to obtain a copy of the report. He recommended that protocol require that a suspect experiencing medical problems be transported to a hospital.

Chief Gascon said that Mesa would follow that procedure, and he added that various protocols developed throughout the country recommend medical observation following TASER use. He assured the Committee that the Mesa Police Department would be on the "cutting edge" in

developing policies and protocols to address the issue, and he advised that he would meet with Fire Chief Harry Beck to coordinate the policies.

In response to a question from Committeemember Somers, Sergeant White advised that restricting TASER use to suspects of a certain age is difficult due to variances in height and weight. He stated that an officer on the scene would utilize his or her best judgment at the time.

Responding to questions from Chairman Whalen regarding the dangers associated with placing a suspect face down, Chief Gascon stated that existing policies clearly address the dangers of positional asphyxia, particularly for suspects on drugs or those who may have a medical condition.

Sergeant White noted that "excited delirium" is a more prevalent cause of many in-custody deaths, and he added that officers are trained to identify the bizarre behavior that is symptomatic of this condition, such as a suspect continuing to struggle or yelling incoherently after being placed in custody. He stated that the Police Department and the Fire Department are aware of these issues, and he advised that the Fire Department has a protocol in place to chemically sedate an individual exhibiting the symptoms. Sergeant White also advised that TASER International corrected earlier problems experienced with probes, and he stated that the Model X26, which is more effective than the earlier model, reduces the possibility of injury to a suspect.

Chief Gascon advised that \$514,000 is currently budgeted for the purchase of Model X26 TASERs, and that the purchase contract will be submitted for Council approval very soon. He noted that TASER International estimates a four-week turnaround upon receipt of the City's order. Chief Gascon stated that he would like all officers to be trained and equipped with a TASER by the end of the year or early next year.

Chairman Whalen thanked Sergeant White for the presentation, and he commended Chief Gascon for his efforts regarding the Use of Force policy.

2. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Police Committee meeting adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Police Committee meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 12th day of September 2006. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK