

Throughout history new tools have brought about major change or totally revolutionized certain industries. Specific examples come to mind, such as the farm tractor, or the modern day firearm. Every year around the holidays I watch as new tools are advertised to easily accomplish something which had been traditionally difficult. Law enforcement is no different. There are certain tools which have been on the belt of almost every police officer in the United States for years, many of which are still there today. These tools typically include a gun, baton, handcuffs, and maybe even a chemical spray such as mace or pepper spray. Throughout the years the courts have ruled on numerous occasions the police should use the least amount of force necessary to restore peace or make an arrest. In law enforcement certain situations present themselves which all too often have resulted in serious injury or death. For example, if officers encounter a person with a weapon coming toward them or refusing to drop the weapon the typical response would probably be the officer using their firearm. Other less lethal options certainly exist, such as a bean bag gun, for example. These weapons might not be used by every law enforcement agency, not be issued to every officer, or the weapon could still be in the car while the incident is happening inside a residence. Critics argue too many serious injuries or deaths occur at the hands of police due to the use of lethal force. The natural question which seems to come up is what new less lethal tools are available to law enforcement to help deal with these situations?

Tasers have been in use at the Weld County Sheriff's Office for several years. This is an electronic device capable of delivering a temporary charge of 50,000 volts, temporarily disabling the person so they can safely be restrained. Most law enforcement agencies have defined a "use of force continuum", as a matter of policy and procedure, which dictates when a particular use of force, including a Taser, can be used. Taser's are typically used to combat a resisting or physically combative suspect. They can also be used as an alternative to deadly force, if consistent with the use of force continuum; a deadly force alternative is immediately present.

Several examples of Taser usage in Weld County include using the device to subdue a suicidal person who refused to drop a machete. In another incident a suspect who had an outstanding arrest warrant was told he was under arrest and attempted to flee from deputies. He was successfully subdued using a Taser.

In each of these examples, without the use of the Taser, deputies would have been limited in the tools available to control the situation. For example, if a gun was used on the suicidal person or a foot pursuit began with the wanted person, injury to either the suspects and / or officers would have resulted.

Officers in our jail have also used the Taser to gain compliance on several occasions. Although available, our corrections officers do not carry Tasers while on duty inside the jail. Only after supervisor approval and exhausting other options are the Tasers deployed.

It should be noted the Taser does not always have to be shot to solve a situation. Several instances have occurred where the deputy simply removed the Taser from a holster, or

pointed it at a suspect, activated the laser, and the suspect gave up. In these examples the mere presence of the Taser was able to de escalate the situation, resulting in no injuries, and the use of the least amount of force necessary to restore peace.

As technology matures new applications are constantly being invented. There are many less lethal options currently available for law enforcement, and many more will be developed over time. Each has their own pros and cons, some are too costly, and others are impractical due to size or other considerations. Tasers are available to each patrol deputy at the Weld County Sheriff's Office. No one working for my office wants to hurt others in this line of work, nor do they expect to be injured while performing their duties. By providing the best tools possible we can help meet those expectations.

(Published in Longmont Times Call)