

# **COVINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT**

## **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**

**Subject: TASERS**

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### **I. Purpose**

To establish and ensure strict adherence to proper training, deployment, reporting and follow-up of the TASER X2 Conducted Electrical Weapon (CEW).

### **II. Statement of Policy**

It shall be the policy of the Covington Police Department to use only that level of force that reasonably appears necessary to control or otherwise subdue violent or potentially violent individuals. In accordance with that policy, the department shall provide officers with the TASER X2 CEW as a means to achieve that end. It shall also be the policy of this department that playing or horseplay involving the TASER will not be tolerated.

### **III. Definitions**

- A. TASER – A conducted electrical weapon (CEW) device with the capability of disrupting the body's ability to communicate messages from the brain to the muscles causing Neuro Muscular Incapacitation (NMI) to the body.
- B. Drive Stun – A secondary function of the TASER is to stun a subject by making direct contact with the arc bays of the X2 to the body, preferably targeting the pressure point areas of the legs and arms.
- C. Smart Cartridge – A replacement cartridge for the TASER, which uses compressed nitrogen to fire two barbed probes on thin connecting wires sending a high voltage/low current signal into a subject.
- D. Sensitive Tissue Area – Areas of the body, which are especially sensitive to injury. These areas include the head, face, neck, genitals, male nipple and female breast.
- E. Spark Display – A non-contact demonstration of the TASER's ability to discharge electricity. The purpose of this display is to convince the subject to comply with a lawful order and avoid the TASER being deployed in the drive stun or probe mode.

#### **IV. Procedures**

- A. Authorized Users: Only sworn officers who have satisfactorily completed this agency's approved training course shall be authorized to carry and utilize the TASER. TASER user updates shall occur on an annual basis.
- B. Weapon Readiness
  - 1. The device will be carried in an approved holster on the support side of the body. Officers not assigned to uniformed patrol may utilize other department-approved holsters and carry the weapon consistent with department training.
  - 2. The device shall be carried fully armed with the safety on in preparation for immediate use when authorized.
- C. Officers authorized to use the device shall be issued a minimum of two cartridges, which shall be loaded into the cartridge bays of the X2 TASER at all times. The cartridges shall be replaced after deployment, damage or consistent with the manufacturer's expiration requirements.
- D. Only TASER and departmental approved battery power sources shall be used in the X2.
- E. Deployment

The TASER is a discretionary compliance technique tool that will be used to gain compliance against actively resisting suspects. As such, the device is prohibited:

- 1. In a punitive or coercive manner;
- 2. On a handcuffed/secured prisoner, absent overtly assaultive behavior that cannot be reasonably dealt with in any other less intrusive fashion;
- 3. On any suspect who does not demonstrate their overt intention to (1) use violence or force against the officer or another person or (2) to flee in order to resist/avoid detention or arrest (in cases where officers would pursue on foot or tackle the suspect);
- 4. In any environment where an officer knows that a potentially flammable, volatile, or explosive material is present (including, but not limited to OC spray with volatile propellant, gasoline, natural gas, or propane);
- 5. In a environment where the subject's fall could reasonably result in death (such as a swimming pool or on an elevated structure);
- 6. On children appearing to weigh less than 100 pounds, unless the subject is attacking the officer or when deadly force is justified;
- 7. On women known to be pregnant unless deadly force is warranted;
- 8. In any situation where the subject or their clothing may be contaminated with a combustible liquid, gas, or highly combustible material;

9. In drive stun or probe mode for pain compliance or NMI for **no more than 15 seconds collectively**, while attempting to take someone into custody; however, drive stun or probe mode may be used in a defensive manner more than 15 seconds collectively, if an officer is being attacked and the suspect is actively assaulting the officer or a third party. Any subsequent CEW applications beyond 15 seconds should be independently justifiable, and the risks should be weighed against other force options
- F. The use of the TASER should be avoided, if possible, in the following situations:
1. Subjects in control of a motor vehicle;
  2. Subjects with known heart problems;
  3. Subjects with an obvious debilitating illness;
  4. The elderly;
  5. Subjects with known neuromuscular disorders such as muscular sclerosis, muscular dystrophy or epilepsy.
- G. The use of the Taser can sometimes be avoided through the use of de-escalation techniques and other non-dynamic law enforcement tools when reasonable. Officers will use de-escalation and other techniques to reduce the immediacy of threats to other peoples' safety and stabilize incidents. Officers will seek, when reasonable, to slow things down but realize not every situation can be de-escalated. An officer's behavior can escalate a situation, but the officer(s) should not attempt to intentionally escalate situations unnecessarily.
- H. In preparation for firing, the TASER shall be pointed in a safe direction, taken off safe, and then aimed. Center mass of the subject's back should be the primary target where reasonably possible; below the nipple line of the chest or legs are the secondary targets.
1. Laser sights should be used as the primary aiming device and the fixed sights as the secondary aiming device.
  2. Before being deployed, the word "TASER" will be used by the deploying officer to announce the TASER's impending use.
  3. Upon firing the device, the officer shall "tase" the subject the least number of times and no longer than necessary to accomplish the legitimate operational objective. The subject is to be secured as soon as practical while disabled by TASER power to minimize the number of deployment cycles.
  4. The subject should be handcuffed and restrained as soon as the officer deems the situation safe for handcuffing. If another officer is present, the other officer should handcuff the subject immediately after the first application of the TASER when the subject is recovering from the initial incapacitation.
  5. **The officer should continue talking to the subject and give verbal commands throughout this process.**

6. The subject will be continually monitored by the officer for any signs of medical distress related to the use of the TASER and shall not be left alone while in the custody of the Covington Police Department. If medical distress is detected, or made known to the officer, emergency medical service personnel will be immediately summoned.
  7. The device may be used in certain circumstances in a "touch stun" or otherwise called "drive stun" mode. This involves pressing the ARC bay against an appropriate area of the body, (pressure points) based on training. It is important to note that when the device is used in this manner:
    - a. Primarily a pain compliance tool due to a lack of probe spread;
    - b. Minimally effective when compared to conventional cartridge type deployments;
    - c. More likely to leave marks on the subject's skin.
  8. When applying the drive stun mode, contact with the offender should be to the trunk, back arms and legs, but not to the face and head.
  9. The officers of this department have an affirmative duty to intervene if they witness a use of force that is clearly unreasonable. The officer, if he/she observes another officer exceeding the use of force, permitted by law, shall intervene to prevent the use of unreasonable force and if necessary, separate the person being arrested from the arresting officer. The Intervening officer shall promptly report these observation(s) and his/her actions to the supervisor.
  10. The TASER should be pointed at the ground in a safe direction with the safety on during loading, unloading, or when handled in other than an operational deployment. Do not hold a cartridge within 3 inches of the TASER.
- I. Aftercare: Following the use of the TASER, the following procedures will be adhered to:
1. The TASER darts shall be removed from the subject after being restrained following the procedures outlined in training. The following areas of the body are considered sensitive: the groin, the face, the neck, the female breast, or the male nipple. Any darts imbedded in these areas will be removed by trained medical professionals. Officers shall use rubber gloves and treat cartridges as a biohazard.
  2. Photographs of the affected area, (probe and drive stun sites) and of any secondary injuries the suspect receives should be taken if the officer or supervisor feels such injuries are serious enough to be documented.
  3. Medical evaluations and clearance shall follow the procedures outlined in training. All suspects where the TASER was used more than 15 seconds collectively will have their vital signs evaluated by Piedmont Newton personnel. Any suspect where the TASER was used less than 15 seconds may have their vital signs evaluated by EMS and/or Covington Fire rescue personnel, upon request from the officer, supervisor or suspect. Any suspect that exhibits signs of delirium or shortness of

breath or other unusual symptoms will require medical screening by the Piedmont Newton Hospital Emergency Room prior to transport to the Newton County Jail.

4. Officers have an affirmative duty to care for persons in their custody. Officers and supervisors are responsible for providing or obtaining appropriate medical attention to any person in their custody who is injured or complains of injury. This pertains whether injuries preceded custody, occurred during apprehension, or were sustained during custody, , even if the arrested persons are believed to be feigning an injury, officers should still take the complaint serious and ensure medical attention is given.
  5. Additionally, officers have an affirmative duty to provide or obtain medical attention for members of the public who are injured because of police involved actions. Officers restraining a subject should be cognizant of, and avoid, positional asphyxia. This department prohibits prolonged face-down prone restraint. The officer should properly restrain the subject and place the subject in an upright position (sitting or standing) or side laying position.
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- J. Reporting: The deploying officer shall notify his/her supervisor as soon as practical after using the device and complete the appropriate Response to Aggression and Resistance Report. In addition to this requirement, whenever any officer points the TASER at a person, but does not deploy it, the involved officer will so note this fact in the incident report, if applicable, for supporting documentation of the charges.
  - K. Supervisor Responsibilities: In addition to interviewing officers, suspects and witnesses at the scene, the reviewing supervisor will ensure photographs are taken of the suspect (if applicable) and the TASER probe sites on the suspect's person as soon as possible following custody.
  - K. Data Collection: TASER data downloading will be conducted by the Office of Professional Standards or by the TASER training staff.
  - L. Sworn officers will be updated in the use of the TASER at least annually. At that time, the TASERS will be inspected by a qualified instructor.
  - M. Training: Officers will show documented proficiency in the use of the TASER at least biennially.
  - N. TASERS may be carried off-duty by officers provided they follow the guidelines for usage detailed in this policy.

***This SOP supersedes any SOP previously issued.***

BY ORDER OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE:

*Stacey L. Cotton*

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Chief of Police