



29 September 2015-09-29

Emmy Rakete

fyi-request-3005-578b325c@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Ms Rakete

Thank you for your email dated 31 July 2015 seeking answers about what studies New Zealand Police has conducted about the (alleged) lethality of Tasers and their potential for abuse by officers, and what procedures Police has to "prevent officers from killing civilians with Tasers".

I have regarded your correspondence as questions as opposed to a request for specific information according to the Official Information Act 1982.

In reply to your first question: "What studies have New Zealand Police conducted into the lethality of these devices [Tasers] and the potential for their abuse by officers?", New Zealand Police has not conducted any studies into the potential lethality of Tasers. Police relies on a combination of publicly available research, evaluation and information, manufacturer specific information, other law enforcement agency information, and input from our own operating environment information, to inform and develop Taser policy and training that is appropriate to our organisation and specific to the New Zealand operating environment.

Furthermore, there are a variety of independent and internal Police use of force monitoring regimes in place that oversee Police use of force and tactical options, including Tasers, to ensure they are being used appropriately.

Additionally, Police publish annual and bi-annual use of force statistics, including Taser use (<http://www.police.govt.nz>).

In 2014 Police received a total of nine complaints related to Tasers. Seven of those complaints were not upheld and two were upheld.

In reply to your second question: "what procedures do the New Zealand Police have to prevent officers from killing civilians with Tasers?", Police are accountable to the law. New Zealand Police has a legislated responsibility to maintain order and protect the public. In most instances Police can fulfil this duty without the need to use force, but there are some instances when Police do have to use force to fulfil this requirement. The Law requires any use of

Safer Communities Together

force to be reasonable (i.e. both necessary and proportionate) and prohibits the excessive use of force.

New Zealand Police has Taser policy, tactical options and use of force policies, operating guidelines and training guidelines that together guide officers in the appropriate use of tactical options. These guidelines focus on de-escalation through communication as the first preventative step to resolve violent (or potentially violent) incidents.

There are a number of risk variables that we are aware of when using a Taser. Those variables are specifically addressed within our policy, operating guidelines and training. They include:

- discouraging multiple and extended discharges of Taser, recognising that, on a case by case basis, it might be necessary to use a Taser multiple times or for an extended time, to overcome violent behaviour;
- a feature on the Taser device is the ability to automatically cut off after each 5 second cycle. This helps ensure that subjects are not exposed to cycles longer than necessary;
- Taser policy and training that focuses on aiming away from the head, face, neck, chest and groin area;
- Taser policy and training that restricts the discharge of Taser on people: who are only passively or actively resisting Police; in elevated positions; operating vehicles and machinery; who are pregnant; involved in demonstrations; in crowd situations; and who are in or around water or combustible substances.

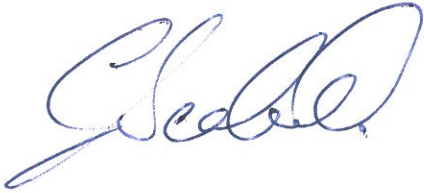
To put all this in context, any use of force poses a risk of injury or, in rare cases, death, of a subject, an officer, or both. Thankfully the latter occurs very rarely in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Police do not use force with the intent of "killing civilians". Out of the 3 million (plus) recorded interactions Police have with the public each year, Police successfully engage with the public 99.9% of the time without having to resort to the use of a tactical option.

Specific to Taser use in New Zealand, for every 9 uses of a Taser, it is only discharged once. When it is discharged, its rate of injury is around 1%. To put this in perspective, since Taser was introduced in 2010, it has been deployed (shown, presented and deployed) over 4000 times, resulting in 47 injuries, the vast majority of which were minor or moderate in nature and did not require any hospital admission. There have been no recorded deaths in New Zealand attributable to Tasers.

New Zealand police publicly and transparently publish use of force and use of tactical options data, including Taser data. Please visit the police website (<http://www.police.govt.nz>) to view these publications.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Scahill', written in a cursive style.

Superintendent Chris Scahill
National Manager: Response & Operations
Police National Headquarters
Wellington