

Clearer taser standards needed, Nova Scotia report says

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HALIFAX — A review into police use of tasers in Nova Scotia says the amount of officer training “differs significantly” between police departments and suggests the province establish standard qualifications for those using the devices.

The report, released Wednesday, also says that police use of the devices has shot up 80 per cent in the past three years — from 101 to 182 incidents last year.

Provincial Justice Minister Cecil Clarke called for the review in November following the death of a 45-year-old Dartmouth man about 30 hours after he was tasered by Halifax police.

Howard Hyde, a man who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, was arrested for spousal abuse. He had struggled with jail guards moments before his death in a Dartmouth jail.

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Mr. Hyde's case was one in a series of taser-related incidents that prompted concern over police use of stun guns.

Nova Scotia's review is one of several across Canada ordered following the death of Robert Dziekanski, the Polish man who died after he was tasered by RCMP officers at Vancouver International Airport on Oct. 14.

Reviews have also been ordered in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and nationally by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Research Centre.

The Nova Scotia review concluded there were wide variations in the taser policies adopted by various police forces and correctional institutions.

- Some police forces require notification of a supervisor before tasers are fired, while others do not.
- The RCMP manual is the only one that sets up special procedures when the person is in excited delirium, a state of heart-pounding agitation.
- Some forces caution against using the device more than once, while others contain no reference to the topic.

But the report repeatedly zeros in on training.

“The amount of training differs significantly among law enforcement agencies: municipal police

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officers and Sheriff Services receive eight hours of training in order to qualify...while the RCMP and Correctional Services staff receive 16 hours of training.”

In recent months, Nova Scotia's Opposition New Democrats have been pushing Mr. Clarke to get tough on what they see as excessive use of the devices.

But the minister has said he won't be rushed into any decisions.

The second part of the review will see a panel of external experts, including representatives from law enforcement and scientific communities, examining the findings and providing advice to the minister.

The justice minister has said the review would also consider a February 2007 incident in which Halifax police shocked a 17-year-old while trying to arrest the teen in her bedroom.

Three officers went to the girl's Dartmouth home after her mother asked her to leave following a dispute.

Police tried to arrest the teen after she started swearing at them. She fought back, was wrestled her to the bed, tasered, then handcuffed.

Two of the officers were kicked in the face while trying to arrest the girl, who was later acquitted of assault.

Police maintained that proper procedures were followed, but a judge ruled the officers had no legal grounds to arrest the girl.

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