

Editing out the essence

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The trust-us mentality at the RCMP was the mark of the bad old days – yes, the period that ended last year – but it still seems to rule, to judge by the Mounties' insistence on deleting crucial information from reports on their use of taser guns. It makes one wonder whether the new RCMP Commissioner, William Elliott, whose job was to change the national police force's insular culture, has not instead become captive to it.

Documents obtained by The Canadian Press and the CBC under the federal access-to-information law were missing essential data, according to news reports this week. Was the person shot with a taser armed? Was that person suffering from mental illness? Did the police call out a warning? The RCMP redacted that information, ostensibly for privacy reasons. Surely it is their own privacy they wish to protect, since no one is named on the forms. Without the information, outsiders cannot judge whether the RCMP is using their taser guns appropriately or not.

Trust the RCMP with tasers? No one who heard the RCMP's official explanation for the fatal tasing last October of the Polish traveller Robert Dziekanski – that he was violent and dangerous – and then saw the truth

played out on an amateur video could unquestioningly accept the RCMP's word on taser use. Mr. Dziekanski, distressed but unarmed and not threatening anyone, was tasered at least twice within 30 seconds of the RCMP's arrival on the scene.

Trust the RCMP with a weapon of massive force that it is now using more than 1,000 times a year? The taser has become a weapon of choice in situations where there is no threat of serious physical harm to anyone. The vague wording in the Mounties' policy – it can be used on someone who is "resistant" – has allowed usage to skyrocket in a few short years.

Trust the RCMP when an independent watchdog, Paul Kennedy, head of the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP, reported in December that the 50,000-volt stun gun is too often used out of proportion to the threat? He called for some narrowing of the current guidelines, requiring at least that the subject be "combative." Yet even that tinkering was nixed by Mr. Elliott.

Trust the HBRCMP (Horribly Broken RCMP)? We think not. The hiding of these details about taser use is another reason for Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day to stop delaying and to reform the national police force.