

# Jury still out on use of tasers

## RCMP watchdog urges restrictive use but rejects outright ban on 50,000-volt guns

OTTAWA ♦ The RCMP watchdog has rejected an outright ban on Taser stun guns but urged Mounties to immediately restrict their use to cases where an individual is “combative” and is at risk of killing or injuring himself or a police officer.

But Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day committed yesterday only to considering the call by Paul Kennedy, chair of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, while awaiting a final report next summer.

Earlier, RCMP Commissioner William Elliott said he would not welcome an order to halt use of the 50,000-volt guns, saying it would compromise the safety of both officers and the public.

Kennedy, asked to study RCMP protocols following the Oct. 14 death of Robert Dziekanski at Vancouver airport, delivered an interim report yesterday, saying the legal authority for police to use force “is not absolute; it must be proportionate and reasonable to the situation ...”

The Mounties, he found, have relaxed rules around the use of Tasers, first introduced in 2001 as a less-than-lethal weapon, but failed to document or justify why such a less restrictive protocol was appropriate.

In 2004, RCMP policy reclassified the weapons as an “intermediate” de-



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**A Niagara police officer pulls the trigger of the Taser during a demonstration of the weapon in Welland earlier this year.**

vice, like pepper spray, and allowed for their use where somebody was showing “resistant” behaviour.

But Kennedy says that means it’s deployed “earlier than reasonable.”

Kennedy also decried the lack of “accurate and meaningful” data within the RCMP about the “benefits or detriments” of the use of Tasers.

He noted there’s been “little done”

to determine how more liberal use of Tasers has affected the use of other options, like pepper spray or batons.

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