

Watchdog protests Taser presentation

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STAFF REPORTER

A watchdog group is calling on the Toronto Police Services Board to cancel an appearance at police headquarters Thursday by the head of Taser International Inc.

"We believe that the Board agreeing to host this event is inappropriate," John Sewell of the Toronto Police Accountability Coalition wrote in a letter delivered today to the board.

On the heels of two inquest juries recommending their expanded use, Chief Bill Blair has submitted a report to the board requesting that all front-line officers be equipped with the devices manufactured by Taser International. It's estimated that would cost \$8.6 million.

Sewell, a former mayor of Toronto, said it is "improper" to give "a possible supplier such a privileged vantage point" where he can say "exactly how great his product is."

"We have no problem with Mr. (Tom) Smith hiring a hall and making the pitch for his product. What is improper is for the Board to provide the venue and the support for this company. This kind of support means the Board is aligning itself with the interests of Taser International Inc. This is wrong."

Last week, board chair Alok Mukherjee said in an email to the *Star* that the meeting was arranged after he held discussions "with various people in light of the incidents in Vancouver and elsewhere." The most high profile incident happened at Vancouver airport last year when a Polish man died after being shocked by RCMP officers using Tasers.

"When the offer was made to me to have Tom Smith come here, I thought it was a great opportunity to have a public event where curious as well as concerned folks could hear directly from him and also have him respond to their questions," Mukherjee said. "So, this is more by way of a public information and interaction session."

Mukherjee added he hoped the meeting "will be educational for Board members also and help them think through the related issues."