

Taser use doubles, report shows

BY THE NUMBERS

94%

of situations effectively de-escalated in 2006

90%

of situations effectively de-escalated in 2007

270 of 352

subjects perceived to be in crisis in 2007 report

77

subjects perceived to have a mental disorder in 2007 report

52

incidents – most incidents of Taser use (by 14 Division)

Watchdog group worries Toronto police officers show same pattern of usage as RCMP, forces in U.S.

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Police officers used Tasers 404 times during 368 incidents on Toronto streets last year, a new report shows.

That number has more than doubled since 2006, but so has the number of officers armed with the electroshock weapons.

Two years ago, 88 officers were armed with Tasers and the controversial weapons were used 174 times in 156 incidents.

In the same year, the Toronto Police Service launched its Taser pilot project. It was deemed a success, and the police services board approved Taser use for all front-line supervisors.

By the end of 2007, 454 front-line supervisors and Emergency Task Force officers were armed with the device.

The report also breaks down the way in which Tasers were used.

Last year, Tasers were fully deployed – meaning police fired darts – 46 per cent of the time, compared to 37 per cent of the time in 2006. A Taser is considered used if it is pulled from its holster.

"What's not in the report, but is becoming apparent in speaking to officers who are authorized to use Tasers, they are seeing many cases where they don't have to use them," said police spokesperson Mark Pugash.

"The mere fact that someone knows the officer has it acts as a de-escalating factor."

But John Sewell of the Toronto Police Accountability Coalition, a community watchdog group, says something else is not in the report.

"I'm very concerned. It obviously means they're using the Taser an awful lot more, more than twice as often," he said. "We're going down the road of other police services that have had Tasers – the RCMP and police in the States."

Records recently released to the CBC and The Canadian Press indicate that Taser use by Mounties has more than doubled since 2005.

Throughout the country, RCMP officers drew the weapons more than 1,400 times in 2007. That's up from 597 in 2005.

"The issue is in this service we have very clear guidelines on when and where the Taser is to be used," Pugash said. "Certainly, the question people are entitled to ask is: Are your policies and procedures being followed. The answer is overwhelmingly – yes."

The report, prepared by Chief Bill Blair, will be presented to the police services board tomorrow.