

February 23, 2009

Support grows for stun guns

Some aldermen calling for all Calgary cops to be equipped with Tasers

By RENATO GANDIA AND KATIE SCHNEIDER, SUN MEDIA

City officials say every Calgary cop should be equipped with Tasers in battling criminal activities, as the release of new national stun-gun guidelines looms.



Ald. John Mar and Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, who both sit on the Calgary Police Commission, are agreeing with a new set of recommendations by the national association of police calling for better access to the stun guns.

The report, to be released tomorrow by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association, suggests all police across the country to be trained and eligible to use Tasers and calls for new rules governing when to use the weapons.

Both Colley-Urquhart and Mar says they're big supporters of Calgary police being able to use Tasers.

"We have the strictest protocol at the Calgary Police Service, of any service across the country," said Colley-Urquhart, adding she'd rather see officers use their Tasers in extreme circumstances than shoot somebody with a gun.

Calgary Police Association president John Dooks also welcomed the report's recommendations, saying front-line officers should be equipped with the stun guns that he said are essential, life-saving tools for the force.

"It's a good idea -- they are definitely a valued tool and proven to be an asset to officers on the front lines," he said.

Of the Calgary Police Service's 1,700 members, 1,100 are front-line officers, but only 400 stun guns are used.

Mar says the recent developments have not been discussed at the commission's meeting, but he believes Tasers are an excellent law enforcement tool.

Theoretically, he'd like to see every Calgary cop armed with the weapon but he's concerned about the cost.

Dooks said the new guidelines and training being proposed in the report are a positive step.



"I think we need the funding to get more," he said, adding the Calgary Police Association has always been open to more training of the devices.

Though the RCMP said earlier this month it would only use Tasers in instances where officers or the public are under threat, not when suspects are being merely resistant, Dooks said the federal force is simply changing policies to be in line with what has already been practised in Alberta for years.

Controversy over the use of stun guns exploded when Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski died after being hit with a Taser at Vancouver International Airport in 2007.