



University Police & PUBLIC SAFETY



STATE COLLEGE POLICE DEPARTMENT

FAQs: TASER IMPLEMENTATION AT PENN STATE AND STATE COLLEGE POLICE DEPARTMENTS

How long have plans been in the works?

The decision to add Tasers as an option for University Police and State College Police officers was made after years of research and discussion by leadership of both departments. For the last 18 months, a joint committee composed of officers from University Police and the State College Police Department has held pointed discussions revolving around training, protocols for the use of Tasers, and the actual purchase of the devices.

With this joint announcement, Penn State's University Park police force and the State College Police Department are the last to add Tasers among all police forces in Centre County, including Ferguson, Patton and Spring townships; Bellefonte Borough; and the Pennsylvania State Police.

Was there a specific incident that precipitated this decision?

No. The decision to add Tasers was made after careful deliberation and the proven ability of the devices to help reduce injuries to both suspects and police. These devices provide a safer option for taking into custody individuals who are resisting and who are clearly at risk of harming themselves or others.

What other law enforcement agencies use these devices? Nationally? In Centre County? At other universities?

With the joint announcement, Penn State's University Park police and the State College Police Department are the last to add Tasers among all police forces in Centre County, including Ferguson, Patton, and Spring townships; Bellefonte Borough; and the Pennsylvania State Police.

Tasers are used by more than 12,000 law enforcement agencies across the country, including the Pennsylvania State Police.

What are the benefits to officers and the public? Why should the campus community feel positively about this change?

The protection of our entire community, including students, faculty and staff, as well as our officers, is the top priority for University Police and Public Safety as well as the State College Police Department. The addition of Tasers addresses a gap between the current options: chemical spray or baton, and a firearm. Hopefully officers never have to use any of these devices. However, if officers are in a situation where someone is resisting and cannot be controlled, they now have the option of a Taser when it is appropriate. This is a safety benefit for both the subject and the officer.

Are we putting our population at greater risk by using Tasers? Haven't they been shown to contribute to deaths in rare cases?

While the use of any method of subduing a violent, resisting subject unfortunately comes with some risk of injury for the subject and the officer, the appropriate use of a Taser has reduced this risk significantly.

Independent studies have shown Tasers to be as safe as or even safer than other use-of-force methods available to law enforcement. The devices also have been shown to reduce the likelihood of injury for both officers and suspects who might otherwise be injured in a physical confrontation.

For example, if a suspect is threatening someone with a knife, currently our officers have limited options and would likely have use the firearm. Tasers would provide a less-lethal option in such a scenario. The addition of these devices enhances our officers' ability to keep our community safe.

Does Penn State and State College have a Taser policy in place?

Both the University Police and Public Safety and the State College Police Department have a comprehensive policy in place. Officers are required to successfully complete training before a Taser is issued, and will be required to complete annual refresher training.

Officers will only be authorized to use a Taser on subjects who are violently resisting arrest or are threatening serious harm to themselves or others. Officers are strictly prohibited from using the devices against compliant or passively resisting individuals. A subject will never be threatened with the use of a Taser unless the officer would be justified in using the device.

In all cases, the use of a Taser will require a thorough post-use evaluation by a supervising officer and the generation of a use of force report. Emergency medical personnel also will respond to the scene whenever a Taser is deployed to offer a medical evaluation to the subject.

Who developed the policy?

The leadership of each police department developed their respective agency's policy in close consultation with each other. Both departments' policies conform to best practices widely accepted by police departments across the country. Below are links to various Taser references:

REFERENCES:

<http://www.taser.com/press-kit>

<http://www.taser.com/images/press-room/TASERCEWPressKitMASTER060514.pdf>

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/231176.pdf>

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/233432.pdf>

<http://www.annemergmed.com/article/S0196-0644%2809%2900646-5/fulltext>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19157651?dopt=Abstract>

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/232215.pdf>

Describe the training that officers have received. Who conducted the training?

Both the Penn State University Police and the State College Police have officers who have been certified by Taser International as official Taser instructors. Those Taser instructors conducted joint training sessions the past month for State College and University Police officers. All officers who carry Tasers are required to complete the initial certification training course, in addition to required annual refresher training. This includes practical, hands-on instruction as well as classroom training. All officers are required to pass a written test before the Taser can be issued to the officer.

Are there federal, state or other guidelines for the use of a Taser?

While there are no absolute Pennsylvania or federal guidelines for the use of any weapon by police, there are sample policies prepared by professional police organizations and others that act as the basis for best practices adopted by police across the country.

How is this policy being applied at the campuses? Is it the same for all?

The leadership of each police department developed their respective agency's policy in close consultation with each other. Both departments' policies conform to best practices widely accepted by police departments across the country.

Yes – all University Police and Public Safety policies are applied evenly across all Penn State campus locations.

What is the timeline for the rollout of Tasers at the University?

University Park and State College police officers who have successfully completed training began carrying Tasers on Feb. 24.

In the coming months, sworn officers at the following Penn State campuses will begin carrying the devices: Abington, Altoona; Beaver; Behrend; Berks;

Brandywine; DuBois; Fayette; Greater Allegheny; Harrisburg; Hazleton; Mont Alto; New Kensington; Schuylkill, Shenango and York.

Within the year, University Police and Public Safety expects that sworn officers at the remaining campuses will begin carrying Tasers, including: Dickinson School of Law in Carlisle; Great Valley; Lehigh Valley; Wilkes-Barre and Worthington Scranton.

What is the model number / type of Taser that will be deployed?

The X-26P Advanced Taser.

How many Tasers has Penn State and State College Police purchased?

Penn State has purchased 50 Tasers, for officers at University Park and at other campus locations. State College purchased 10 Tasers in December 2014 and will be purchasing an additional 10 Tasers in the first quarter of 2015 for their police department.

How much is the University spending on this? Why is this a good investment?

The University has purchased 50 of the devices at a cost of \$70,000. The protection of our students, faculty and staff, as well as officers, is the top priority for University Police and Public Safety. The addition of Tasers will give police an effective option for subduing a violent subject, one that has been shown to reduce the risk of injury, both for the subject and for police officers.

The State College Police Department purchased 10 Tasers, Taser cartridges, and Taser holsters in December 2014 and will be purchasing an additional 10 Tasers in the first quarter 2015. The total cost for 20 Tasers and related equipment is approximately \$30,000.

Both departments believe the money invested in Tasers demonstrates our commitment to providing excellent public safety services to our community members and to enhancing the protection we provide to our officers.