



## TASERS FACT FICTION AND FANTASY

**Invented by Jack Cover in 1974 the “Thomas A Swift Electronic Rifle” or TASER is now commonly used in the USA and other countries in violent confrontations. Any new law enforcement tool is bound to generate controversy and community curiosity, but after more than 10 years operational use in the USA, it is time to objectively assess the evidence.**

---

**T**he Police Association believes TASER’s benefits for the community and the police overwhelmingly outweigh the arguments against them. On its own initiative, the Association funded two research papers from independent medical experts who concluded TASERS were clearly safe to use. Before the last election, the previous Bracks Government advised the Association it had set aside 10 million dollars to provide TASERS to the Victoria Police Force.

But when the Association provided the research and political commitment to the Chief Commissioner her response was less than enthusiastic. Although some TASERS have been issued to the Special Operations Group, and Critical Incident Response Teams, so far there has been no decision about their availability to the front line.

In view of this frustrating delay, the Association advises all members to make themselves familiar with both the facts and fiction about TASERS, in case they are called on to explain the issue to the community.

### THE FICTION

**1.** Tasers can kill. There has not been one death attributed to the use of TASERS. This is despite dozens of inquests and inquiries in the USA, both by Coroners and Grand Juries.

**In every TASER investigation, death was a judged to be a likely consequence during violent struggles with police from other medical or drug induced factors. TASERS were excluded as a causal factor.** This is a remarkable result considering America is a litigious society where the legal system has a history of enabling aggrieved citizens to win compensation in the courts, especially against the Police.

**2.** Amnesty International claims since 1991 TASERS have claimed 150 lives in the US. The claim is nothing more than an opinion piece from a particular political point of view, and provides no supporting scientific evidence.

**3.** A 2007 United Nations Report described TASERS as a form of



torture, and can cause death in “certain cases.” This is really a statement of the obvious if TASERS were to be used for that purpose in countries with no regard for human rights or the Geneva Convention. Batons, blowtorches, electric terminals, buckets of water, even telephone books can be instruments of torture in the hands of those so inclined. So too can TASERS, but this can hardly be a legitimate argument to ban them.

## THE FACTS

A TASER is an electronic stun gun. Unlike capsicum sprays, batons, or even martial arts it does not rely on the infliction of pain to modify violent behaviour. Its externally applied high voltage current overrides the central nervous system causing immediate loss of limb coordination. There is no skin penetration, or bruising. The paralysis occurs within seconds of the applied voltage and goes away just as quickly with no side effects. A violent pregnant woman in America was “Tasered” with no medical complications to her or her baby.

Every jurisdiction in the USA where TASERS are regularly available has reported dramatic drops in death and injury to police and the public. The most significant is an eight year study started by the Los Angeles County which includes L.A. City, and covers a population close to Australia’s. The LAPD started intensively monitoring TASERS and CS sprays in 1991 as authorised non lethal weapons, and found TASERS safer and more

effective in violent confrontations. Sixteen years later TASERS are now carried by 130,000 front line officers in LA and 350 other Police Departments in the USA.

In 2003 Seattle Police Force was fatality free for the first time in 15 years, with the Police Chief acknowledging TASERS were a major contributing factor.

The evidence so far suggests TASERS neutralise the most extreme forms of violent behaviour no matter the mental state or physical strength of the person needing restraint. They are ideal for both urban situations and remote one man stations where backup can be hours away.

The Chief Commissioner’s delay puts Victoria Police behind the rest of Australia, and other Police Forces around the world. The Government made a pre-election commitment to The Police Association that it would be consulted in relation to modern equipment. It was our expectation that this issue would be finalised in 2007. The Association is disappointed that the Government has reneged on its promise and is dragging the chain, along with the Chief Commissioner. The Queensland Government has just committed itself to issuing TASERS to its police by the middle of the year. Other States in Australia are well advanced to make TASERS a legitimate operational option for their Police Forces.

Former Victorian Deputy Commissioner and current West Australian Chief Commissioner Bob Falconer has called on The Victorian Chief Commissioner

to make a definitive decision on TASERS. Mr Falconer notes that “never before, certainly in Victoria, have senior police taken so long to implement a form of equipment.”

TASERS are clearly a sensible and sometimes superior option over firearms for violent confrontations. Even in the hands of a properly trained police officer, a firearm is always potentially a lethal weapon. Lee Kennedy was shot dead during a confrontation with police at Shepparton in April 2005. Last month a Coroner decided the members concerned acted in self defence. Kennedy’s widow Melissa says “It’s no use holding grudges against officers but there would be more people alive if the Police were using stun guns.”

The Association agrees.

Anyone forced into a fatal self defence decision will tell you killing another human being is a traumatic experience he or she would wish on no one. The trauma can be drawn out by lawyers and libertarians’ microscopic analysis of a split second decision, let alone civil proceedings for compensation. Even if their actions are later justified, members would be less than human if they didn’t face a lifetime of soul searching in these tragic circumstances.

While Police Minister Bob Cameron has declined to become involved, the Association calls on the Chief Commissioner to just get on with it.

TASER technology is proven, the need is there, the money is available, and most importantly, lives can, and most likely, will be saved.