

Certain Types of Pepper Spray + Taser = Potentially Lethal

07/03/12

New Jersey police officers will soon be permitted to employ "conducted energy devices (CED)," commonly known as tasers. Used properly, tasers can be an effective tool to bring a violent suspect under control without the need to resort to deadly force. The New Jersey Attorney General should be commended for insisting that the use of tasers by law enforcement be the subject of testing and evaluation to determine how the devices can be used safely and how officers should be trained.

During the course of the vetting process for these conducted energy devices, law enforcement discovered a disturbing possibility. It seems that some New Jersey police departments equip officers with a type of pepper spray (known as OC by the law enforcement community) which contains a flammable liquid. When officers spray this type of pepper spray, a suspect's clothing becomes dampened with this flammable propellant. If that pepper spray does not diffuse a volatile situation, and officers resort to use of a taser, the consequences can be deadly:

certain types of aerosol chemical or natural agents can ignite when subjected to the electric spark generated by a CED dart/electrode. This poses a very serious threat to public and officer safety.

The Attorney General has therefore directed that:

- no officer shall be authorized by his or her agency to fire and discharge a CED unless and until the chief executive of the agency reports in writing that no officer employed by the agency is equipped with an aerosol spray device that emits a flammable substance.
- any officer who is equipped with an aerosol spray device that emits a flammable substance and who discharges such device against a suspect shall be responsible for alerting all other officers at the scene, and any officer(s) who may take custody of the suspect, that 1) the suspect has been subjected to the use of an aerosol spray device that emits a flammable substance, and 2) notwithstanding any provision of the Revised Policy On Conducted Energy Devices to the contrary, the use of a CED against the suspect is strictly prohibited.

[A 2011 story on 60 Minutes](#) suggested that officers in other jurisdictions may resort to use of a taser much too quickly. The respected [National Institute of Justice](#) has observed that "a critical research question is whether officers can become too reliant on CEDs. During interviews with officers and trainers, the researchers heard comments that hinted at a 'lazy cop syndrome.' Some officers may turn to a CED too early in an encounter and may rely on a CED rather than on their conflict resolution skills or even on hands-on applications."

While the taser is undoubtedly an effective law enforcement tool when used properly, proper training and oversight is essential for public safety and to minimize misuse.

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