

GAO
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-464](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Emerging domestic and international threats have generated a growing interest in the use of less-than-lethal weapons by government and law enforcement agencies and other entities such as commercial airlines. One such weapon—the Taser—is a hand-held weapon that delivers an electric shock via two stainless steel barbs, effectively incapacitating an individual. According to the manufacturer—Taser International, Incorporated (Taser International)—Tasers are currently used by over 7,000 of the 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States, with more than 140,000 Tasers in use by police officers in the field and an additional 100,000 Tasers owned by civilians worldwide. Tasers have been used on over 100,000 volunteers, including individuals involved in training seminars and research experiments, and involved in over 70,000 actual field uses during police encounters.

In light of the expanding interest in the Taser, GAO was asked to provide information on (1) the policies and procedures related to the issues of “use-of-force,” training, operations, and safety for selected law enforcement agencies that have purchased and used Tasers and (2) federal, state, and local laws that specifically address Tasers, including the Transportation Security Administration’s (TSA) authority to regulate Tasers on aircraft.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-464.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robert J. Cramer at (202) 512-7455 or cramerr@gao.gov.

TASER WEAPONS

Use of Tasers by Selected Law Enforcement Agencies

What GAO Found

The seven law enforcement agencies we contacted have established use-of-force policies, training requirements, operational protocols, and safety procedures to help ensure the proper use of Tasers. Although none of the agencies have separate use-of-force policies that specifically address Tasers, all seven agencies include the use of Tasers into their existing policies. Taser training is required for officers who use the weapons, and agency officials said that training for officers and other non-law enforcement persons who are allowed to use Tasers is critically important to help ensure their safe use. Operational protocols require that Tasers be visually inspected daily, appropriately safeguarded, and, in some cases, tested weekly or at the beginning of an officer’s shift. Safety procedures require that Tasers not be used on children, pregnant suspects, or near bystanders or flammable liquids and that individuals hit in specific body areas with Taser barbs, such as the neck or face, be examined by a physician.

Some federal, state, and local jurisdictions have laws that address Tasers but requirements differ. For example, at the federal level, the Army prohibits Tasers from being brought into selected military installations in Georgia. Also, TSA may approve the use of Tasers on aircraft but must prescribe training rules and guidance on appropriate circumstances for using Tasers. At the state and local levels, the state of Indiana and the city of Chicago, Illinois, regulate the sale or possession of Tasers by non-law enforcement persons by subjecting Tasers to the same restrictions that apply to firearms. Other states, such as California, prohibit Tasers from being carried into public facilities such as airports.

GAO observes that as the Taser becomes more widely used, especially by non-law enforcement persons, training is critical to help ensure its safe, effective, and appropriate use. TSA, Taser International, and the seven law enforcement agencies we contacted generally agreed with the information in this report.

Two Examples of Taser Models



Source: GAO; Prince George’s County, MD, Sheriff’s Office; Prince George’s County, MD, Police Department.