



Welfare Implications of
***The Use of Electro-Muscular
Disruptive Devices or “TASER®
Devices” on Animals***

(July 26, 2010)

WHAT IT IS

The 26-watt current delivered by the ADVANCED TASER® M26 electronic control device^a causes uncontrollable muscle contraction and overwhelming pain that incapacitates the subject.¹ The ADVANCED TASER® M26 electronic control device delivers a sequence of pulses, each having a peak amplitude of about 18 amps and a duration of about 11 microseconds. The peak voltage output of the device is as high as 50,000 volts. The weapon can be turned off before the end of the five-second default period. The barbs of the weapon are expelled on 21-foot-long copper wires and attach to the subject's skin. The barbs remain attached until they are removed. This allows further electrical discharges to be delivered via the copper wires should the subject resume non-compliant and/or threatening behavior. The cartridge that fires the weapon can be detached, which allows the weapon to be used in close quarters. In this case the barbs are not fired from the weapon but are placed in contact with the subject by the bearer of the weapon. The weapon still transmits electrical discharges to the subject when used in this manner (i.e., stun gun).

THE ISSUE

Many communities are considering equipping their animal control and other front-line officers with electro-muscular disruptive devices (EMDD) or TASER® devices. However there is a lack of credible data on their safety and effectiveness in animal control situations. With this lack of data in mind the National Animal Control Association (NACA) developed a policy on the use of EMDDs in 2005 (revised 2006).²

NACA POLICY

Use of Electro Muscular Disruption Device (EMDD) on Animals²

Policy Statement

The use of any EMDD (more commonly known by the trade name "Taser") is not recommended by NACA for use on animals.

Basis for Policy

NACA recognizes the use of certain weapons originally designed for human restraint may cause serious injury or death to animals in situations of normal use. There is no current data to support the use of any EMDD on animals for capture or restraint. NACA does not support the use of these instruments in normal animal control activities. The use of such equipment may lead to serious liability.

Policy Recommendations

NACA does not recommend the use of any EMDD for control or capture of animals.

In the fall of 2009 NACA reviewed its policy and changed it to read:

Personnel Training and Safety – Use of Electro Muscular Disruption Device (EMDD) on Animals²

Guideline Statement

This information has been prepared as a service by the American Veterinary Medical Association's Animal Welfare Division. Mention of trade names, products, commercial practices or organizations does not imply endorsement by the American Veterinary Medical Association.

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The use of any EMDD (more commonly known by trade name "Taser") is not recommended by NACA for use on animals for routine capture or restraint. EMDD's may be used as a defensive tool to provide an Animal Control Officer with non-lethal force in response to aggressive humans or dogs in accordance with agency training, policies and procedures. EMDD's should never be used on cats or other small animals.

Basis for Guideline

NACA recognizes the use of certain weapons originally designed for human restraint may cause serious injury or death to animals in situations of normal use. There is no current data to support the use of any EMDD on animals for routine capture or restraint. NACA does not support the use of these instruments in normal animal control activities. The use of such equipment may lead to serious liability.

Guideline Recommendation

NACA does not recommend the use of any EMDD for routine capture or restraint of animals. Use of an EMDD should only be approved after the Animal Control Officer has been CERTIFIED in species specific training that includes deployment which includes humane veterinary care treatment provisions. The EMDD protocol should include a prohibition on use against cats and other small animals.”

ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER TRAINING

Some municipalities have mandated training for all animal control officers. These training courses consist of lectures, presentations, and/or demonstrations of topics relating to animal control (e.g., capture and handling, disposition of animals, communication skills, animal health, laws, animal cruelty investigations). The states of New Jersey³, Pennsylvania⁴, and Texas⁵ have statutes requiring training of animal control officers. These states have training programs in place that are open enrollment. NACA also provides courses in animal control.⁶

ALTERNATIVES

Oleoresin capsicum is derived from an inflammatory substance found in cayenne peppers. Oleoresin capsicum (“pepper” or “OC”) sprays appear to be a less-than-lethal option for repelling attacks of captive wildlife⁷ and aggressive dogs.^{8,9} Pepper sprays work by irritating the ocular and respiratory membranes, which distracts or debilitates the attacker.⁷ Some highly motivated animals may not be sufficiently incapacitated by the physiological effects of pepper spray and may be able to ignore the associated pain.⁷ Training and policies for use of pepper sprays should be provided to staff prior to issuing products for use.⁷ When selecting a product, it is important to consider the effective spray distance, spray pattern, duration of spray, quantity of oleoresin capsicum in spray, canister size and any safety features.⁷

AVMA

The AVMA is concerned for the safety of animals on which EMDD's are used. However, AVMA recognizes that EMDD's offer an alternative to the use of lethal force in response to a direct attack by an aggressive animal. It is important to note that there are no data supporting the efficacy of EMDD's against animals that are highly motivated or have abnormalities such as rabies infection. EMDD's can be lethal and should not be used on cats or other small animals.

FOOTNOTES

^a M26, TASER®, and ADVANCED TASER®, are trademarks of TASER international, Inc., registered in the U.S. All rights reserved.

REFERENCES

¹ Bleetman, A., Steyn, R., and Lee, C. Introduction of the Taser into British policing. Implications for UK emergency departments: an overview of electronic weaponry. *Emerg Med J.* 2004; 21:136-140.

² National Animal Control Association. Personnel Training and Safety – Use of Electro Muscular Disruption Device (EMDD) on Animals. Available at: <http://www.nacanet.org/guidelines.html#emdd> Accessed January 25, 2010.

³ An act concerning animal control officers, amending various parts of the statutory law, and supplementing Title 4 of the Revised Statutes. Pub L 1941. c.151 (C.4:19-15.1). 9 Sep 1997. Available at: <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/9697/Bills/PI.97/247.PDF> Accessed February 2, 2010.

⁴ An act amending title 22 (Detectives and Private Police) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, further providing for society police officers' appointment, qualifications, authority and discipline; conferring powers and duties on the Department of Agriculture; establishing the Humane Society Police Officer Advisory Board and making a related repeal. 22 Pa.C.S. Printer's no. 1940. 15 Nov 2004. Available at: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btCheck.cfm?txtType=PDF&sessYr=2003&sessInd=0&billBody=S&billTyp=B&billNbr=0871&pn=1940> Accessed February 2, 2010.

⁵ Health and safety code Title 10 Health and safety of animals Chapter 829 Animal control officer training. 80th leg R.S. Ch 1331, Sec 1. 1 Sept 2007. Available at: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/health/zoonosis/education/training/aco/manual/information/829law.pdf> Accessed February 2, 2010.

⁶ National Animal Control Association. NACA Training Academy. Available at: <http://www.nacanet.org/training.html> Accessed February 2, 2010.

⁷ Miller, D.S. Review of oleoresin capsicum (pepper) sprays for self-defense against captive wildlife. *Zoo Biol.* 2001;20:389-398.

⁸ Edwards, S.M., Granfield, J. and Onnen, J. Evaluation of pepper spray. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice Research in Brief. 1997(february):1-8.

⁹ Morabito, E.V. and Doerner, W.G. Police use of less-than-lethal force:oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray. *PIJPSM.* 1997;20(4):680-697.