

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

New report highlights Taser risks in Victoria

12 October 2010

A report released today by the Victorian Federation of Community Legal Centres highlights risks around Taser use by Victoria Police. The report analyses policies and data on Victoria Police Taser use obtained by the Federation using freedom of information processes over the past 3 years.

Analysis in the report highlights that:

- between 2004 and 2009, specialist Victoria Police units discharged a Taser in 83 incidents;
- according to police classification of incidents, 85% of Taser use by Critical Incident Response Teams was against people with mental illness;
- in three incidents, a Taser was used to remove a person from a police cell or police interview room;
- 32% of incidents involved multiple Taser shocks on the same person with the largest number being five shocks on one person;
- 28% of Taser use by Critical Incident Response Teams was against unarmed people; and
- 30% of the Special Operations Group Taser incident reports state that the Taser was used to gain compliance or because the person 'failed to comply with instructions'.

The report identifies concerns around Tasers being used in the presence of flammable substances, incidents where Taser use was ineffective and particular incidents of concern, including one incident where a Taser was used on an unarmed man 'who had been standing outside store with arms raised in air for about 90 minutes talking to security camera in foreign language.'

Federation Executive Officer, Hugh de Kretser said, 'Tasers are not a non-lethal option. Taser use carries risks of serious injury and death. It is not a simplistic question of whether you'd prefer to be Tased than shot. There are better ways to reduce police shootings, such as refocusing on negotiation and cordon and contain tactics, better incident planning and better training around dealing with mental illness.'

He added, 'While specialist police officers are not using Tasers very often, the data about how the weapons are used suggests there are systemic problems. If highly trained officers can misuse Tasers then the public should be gravely concerned about the possibility of Tasers being provided to all general duties officers in Victoria.'

The report argues that there should be an independent and comprehensive public review of Taser use in Victoria before any decision can be made about the future of Tasers in Victoria.

The report will be released at a media launch at 10.30am on 12 October 2010 at level 10, 225 Bourke Street, Melbourne. Copies of the report are available for download from www.communitylaw.org.au.

Further information:

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