

# More Tasers for York officers

BY JOE FANTAUZZI  
jfantauzzi@yrmg.com

York Regional Police will hand more than three dozen Tasers to front-line supervisory officers starting in September.

The move, approved by the York Region Police Services Board yesterday, is the first step in a plan the force hopes will more than triple its cache of the conducted energy weapon by 2012.

A survey conducted by the York Region Media Group shows York police is the last force in the Greater Toronto Area to arm front-line supervisors with the device.

Regional police in Peel, Durham and Halton as well as Toronto all have them.

It's a fact of which York Deputy Chief Bruce Herridge said he was aware.

*'Our people don't want to be shooting people.'*

"Our front-line people are saying 'Our peers have access to this technology, why don't we?' And, that was one of the motivations. We've got to support our people."

The 39 Tasers York police will purchase this year cost \$1,500 each. The police board has authorized the force to spend \$128,434, which will buy the devices and ancillary equipment, such as holsters.

Under current provincial guidelines, only front-line supervisors and tactical officers are permitted to carry Tasers.

York police have discharged Tasers twice this year and did so twice last year, Deputy Chief Herridge said.

"There have been enough decisions coming out of inquiries, inquests, reviews — even by our own legal people — to say there's an element of risk that's increasing to the organization," he said. "Somebody is going to say one day 'You had the ability to do this, why haven't you done it yet?' We wanted to stop that."

Putting the devices in officers' hands gives them another option than drawing a fire-arm.

"Our people don't want to be shooting people," Deputy Chief Herridge said.

And, he said, any officer found to be abusing the weapon will be disciplined.

Because tactical officers are now the only York officers carrying the weapon, there are usually only about half a dozen deployed across the region at a given time. When officers are confronted with dangerous situations, police believe making them wait for a Taser to arrive from elsewhere in the region

can put them in peril.

York police currently own 24 Tasers.

If the second phase of the plan is implemented next year and 46 Tasers are purchased, more front-line supervisors, along with supervisors who work with specialized units such as drugs and vice, traffic or the courts, would be next in line to get Taser access, according to Deputy Chief Herridge said.

Also influencing the force's decision was a 2009 inquest jury that recommended the force hand Tasers to all officers permitted to carry the weapon.

The jury probed the 2005 death of Jeffrey George Black, 21, who was shot dead by York police officers responding to a Markham alarm call.

While the service didn't act on the recommendation, Deputy Chief Herridge acknowledged equipping more officers with the device has been on the force's agenda since the first were handed to tactical officers in 2002.

High profile incidents involving Tasers, such as the 2007 death of Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski, who died after being shocked by police at the Vancouver International Airport, and what he believes to be misinformation about the device would have made it challenging to forge ahead with an extended rollout earlier, he said.

The final report into Mr. Dziekanski's death found officers were not justified in shocking him.

*'Our front-line people are saying 'Our peers have access to this technology, why don't we?'*

In a report presented to the board yesterday, coroner Dr. William Lucas said the chief coroner's office believes Tasers play a very useful role in police use of force and he endorses giving the weapon to front-line supervisors.

Police have repeatedly asked the province to allow trained regular front-line officers to carry Tasers, but Queen's Park does not appear ready to budge on the subject, Deputy Chief Herridge said.

The Black inquest jury also recommended the province amend laws that restrict the use of Tasers to specialized police units and supervisors.

So, in the meantime, York is taking an "intermediate" step by handing the devices to supervisors, Deputy Chief Herridge said.

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We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

# Police widow confronts killer

BY JOE FANTAUZZI  
jfantauzzi@yrmg.com

A York police officer's widow felt as if her husband had died again when a Newmarket jury convicted his killer of manslaughter, not murder, April 28.

During a sentencing hearing Tuesday at the Newmarket courthouse, Sonja Plunkett's voice often shifted between sorrow and anger as she described the impact the death of her husband, Det.-Const. Robert Plunkett, has had on her and their three children, Amanda, Jeff and Matt.

She also expressed her feelings about Nadeem Jiwa, the 23-year-old man responsible for her husband's death.

"Hearing the final verdict from the jury was — and still is — a difficult and almost impossible emotion to describe," Mrs. Plunkett told the packed courtroom. "I heard the word manslaughter, but could not believe it. I was overwhelmed with emotion and pain and have only felt that way one other time in my life — the morning of Aug. 2, 2007, when I was told that Rob had died."

She shuns being labelled a widow, but, understanding that a widow means being empty, Mrs. Plunkett acknowledged there is no other word more accurate to describe her.

"Nadeem Jiwa, your actions made me a widow," she told the Scarborough man, who was sitting in the prisoner's dock. "You

caused this emptiness."

Mr. Jiwa, who periodically looked down or stared at the interior of the prisoner's dock during the sentencing hearing, showed no emotion.

Family members and supporters of the Plunkett family and Mr. Jiwa were in the courtroom for the hearing.

That neither Mr. Jiwa nor his family have shown any remorse in the four years since her husband's death is "unforgivable", Mrs. Plunkett told the court.

Recounting her emotional torment, Mrs. Plunkett said she has spent many nights awake, trying to remember what her husband looked like while alive and not in his casket.

She has been diagnosed with depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, she said.

When snow fell the first winter after Det.-Const. Plunkett's death, she drove to the cemetery and shovelled snow from her husband's grave.

Before Det.-Const. Plunkett was killed, the couple often discussed retirement plans.

"Instead of retirement plans, I was faced with planning a huge police funeral for my 43-year-old husband," she said, adding every day is a constant struggle.

A sentencing date is set for June 29.

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