

Ontario expands police Taser use after Sammy Yatim shooting

Police forces will make decision about which officers carry stun guns

[CBC News](#)

Posted: Aug 27, 2013

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Ontario's governing Liberals will allow police to expand the use of stun guns in the wake of last month's fatal shooting of teenager Sammy Yatim aboard a Toronto streetcar.

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Ontario Community Safety Minister Madeleine Meilleur made the announcement Tuesday, exactly one month after Yatim, 18, was shot multiple times and stunned with a Taser by police during a confrontation on an empty streetcar.

Meilleur said existing rules that limit the use of Tasers, also known as stun guns or conductive energy weapons (CEWs), will be changed to clear the way for individual police forces to set their own guidelines about which officers can use them.



The fatal shooting of Toronto teenager Sammy Yatim has sparked debate about the use of force by police. (Facebook)

Prior to Tuesday's announcement, Ontario had restricted the use of stun guns to a select few supervising and tactical officers, setting Ontario police apart from counterparts in several other provinces and with the RCMP.

Police chiefs have been advocating for the expanded use of stun guns for years.

'The right decision to make'

Meilleur said the move will widen the use-of-force options available to police.

“This is the right decision to make and will increase community safety by preventing injury and death,” she said.

She also said the decision to expand stun gun use is based on research, stakeholder input and past inquests by coroners, and added that the province will keep a "watchful eye" on how stun guns are used by police.

Meilleur said the Yatim shooting did not play a role in Tuesday's decision, saying it had been in the works for months.

She also said each time a police officer uses a stun gun, it will be recorded and reviewed.

Toronto police Deputy Chief Michael Federico told CBC News that his officers will provide stun guns to more front-line officers, who will first receive approximately 12 hours of training.

Federico said that stun guns are "one part of an overall response that police officers can bring to a situation," but they are not a solution to the mental-health issues that police frequently deal with.

Toronto police received 20,000 calls in both 2011 and 2012 that involved with people who were believed to be either experiencing an emotional disturbance or suffering from a mental disorder, Federico said.

Police end up apprehending about 8,500 individuals in these cases each year.

"That's 8,500 events where we believe somebody was significantly distressed or disturbed to require a referral to a psychiatric facility," he said.

"It's a sizable problem in Canadian society and relying on the police to deal with it is going to result in, at best, a Band-Aid kind of solution and at worst, an inevitable tragic outcome."

Responding to Tuesday's announcement, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association said expanding stun gun use is not the right approach. The CCLA says there should instead be more police training on de-escalation techniques and how best to deal with emotionally disturbed people.

The Special Investigations Unit — Ontario's police watchdog — [has charged](#) Toronto police Const. James Forcillo with second-degree murder in Yatim's death.

Ontario's ombudsman [has launched his own probe](#) into the Yatim shooting, to determine the kind of direction the provincial government provides to police for defusing conflict situations.

Retired justice Dennis O'Connor has been asked by Toronto police Chief Bill Blair to [lead a separate review](#) of police procedures, use of force and police response when dealing with emotionally disturbed people.

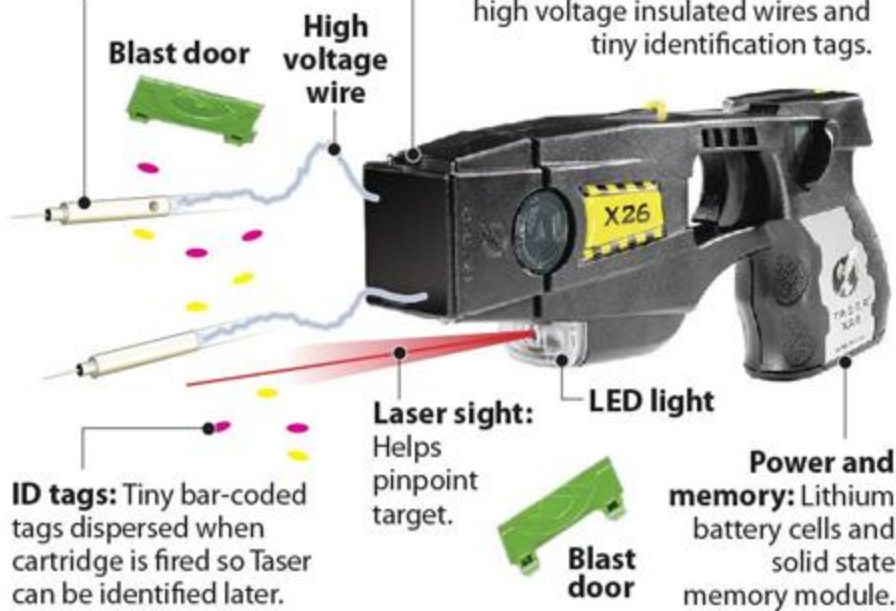
ANATOMY OF A TASER GUN

The Taser uses a high-voltage electrical shock – up to 50,000 volts – to penetrate barriers such as clothing followed by a lower voltage stimulation pulse to cause neuromuscular incapacitation.

A LOOK AT THE TASER X26:

Probes: Metal probes on high voltage wires hook into skin or clothes.

Replaceable cartridge: Module contains compressed nitrogen cartridge, metal probes, high voltage insulated wires and tiny identification tags.

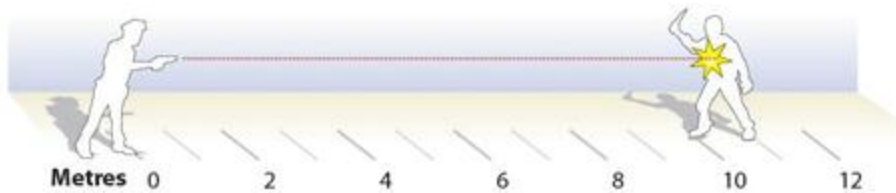


ID tags: Tiny bar-coded tags dispersed when cartridge is fired so Taser can be identified later.

Laser sight: Helps pinpoint target.

Power and memory: Lithium battery cells and solid state memory module.

Taser range: X26 can hit target up to 10.6 metres (35 feet) away.



SOURCE: TASER INTERNATIONAL

T. HOY, S. VOKEY / THE CANADIAN PRESS

(The Canadian Press)