



Friday, September 17, 2004

## **Police chief, NAACP's Mack face Taser zap Volunteers hope shocking test brings better understanding**

By [HECTOR CASTRO](#)

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

It started with civil rights activist Carl Mack challenging Seattle police on their growing use of Tasers, and police officials defending the electric stun device.

It has come to this: Mack, president of the Seattle chapter of the NAACP, and police Chief Gil Kerlikowske each will be shot with 50,000 volts of electricity at 10 a.m. today at police headquarters.

"There are people on my board who looked at me like, 'You're crazy,' " said Mack. "But this is part of serving (as president). I need to know."

Kerlikowske said volunteering seemed a natural reaction when Mack asked recently to experience a Taser shot.

"I said, 'Well, I've never actually experienced it, but if you're willing to experience it, then maybe I should do this also,' " he said. "Of course, immediately thinking that (Deputy) Chief Harry Bailey or (Assistant) Chief Nick Metz would jump in and say, 'Oh no, chief, we'll do it.' Instead, neither one of them did."

Two of the department's training officers will be the trigger men. They haven't decided who shoots the chief.

"Tom Burns and I are going to do rock, paper, scissors," Officer Chris Myers joked, referring to another training officer. "It would be the first time I tased my own chief."

While Kerlikowske and Mack have taken some teasing for what will prove to be a painful experience, the reasons for today's demonstration are serious for them both.

Nationally, critics believe Tasers are sometimes abused by police and may have played a role in some deaths, though none in Seattle. But police and makers of the device defend it, saying it is safe and does not cause any permanent damage.

By stepping in front of the Taser himself, Kerlikowske hopes that one result of the demonstration will be proof of his faith in the devices. Mack said he's not worried that a Taser shot will permanently harm him.

His real concern, he said, is the potential for abuse.

"All we're asking for is fairness," Mack said.

This year, he said, his office has received about half a dozen complaints. The Police Department's Office of Professional Accountability has received four. At least two claims for damages have been filed with the city because of Tasers.

Department statistics show that African Americans make up a disproportionate number of those shot with Tasers. A summary report of all incidents of Taser use between 2001 and 2003 shows that 45 percent of the subjects were African American, though they make up just 8 percent of the city's population, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

For these reasons, Mack began meeting with police leaders several weeks ago to voice his concerns.

"At the time, I didn't know anything about the Tasers," he said.

He wanted to learn about the policies governing Taser use by Seattle police but also about the technology.

It made sense, he said, to volunteer to be shot with a Taser so he could understand those who came to him with complaints.

"I just needed to know what it felt like, so when somebody comes into the offices of the NAACP, I'm a little bit closer to them," Mack said.

Kerlikowske said it made sense to experience the Taser because he is accountable for their use.

"It probably is important for me to understand (them), from not just the technical perspective from watching the demonstrations, but from experiencing it," he said.

Kerlikowske's willingness made a strong impression on Mack, who has been critical of law enforcement in the past on issues of police complaints and officer-involved shootings.

"He's trying to meet us halfway," Mack said. "Now I know he and I are going to both bring a little bit better understanding than we did before this. I just really appreciated that."

Some Seattle police officers began carrying Tasers about four years ago. Their use was prompted in part by some high-profile police shootings in the 1990s, particularly the 1999 death of David Walker, a mentally ill man who was armed with a knife.

More than 200 officers now carry the M-26 Taser, produced by Taser International. Most officers with Tasers keep the devices in a low-slung holster attached to their thigh.

The Taser fires two needle-like probes, each on 21-foot copper wires that transmit 50,000 volts of electricity, delivering a painful, disabling shock.

It can also be used without probes as a close-contact stun gun.

Mack and Kerlikowske won't be shot with the probes. Officers instead will attach alligator clips to them, then deliver the electric shock.

To most police officers, Tasers are a valuable tool that have saved officers from injury and, in some cases, allowed them to arrest people that they otherwise might have shot.

In 2003, Seattle police officers were not involved in any shootings, and Kerlikowske has given some of the credit to the Tasers.

But because there have been complaints as well, Mack and others have focused on how to make sure the devices are used appropriately by police.

"I do not have a problem with lawful law enforcement," Mack said. "But I will forever have a problem with unlawful law enforcement."

One reason to make the demonstration public, he said, is to get the word out that there are policies governing how Tasers are used.

"There is an accounting aspect to the use of these Tasers," Mack said.

Kerlikowske said he hopes today will give him two things: an understanding of how it feels for someone to be shot with a Taser and a closer relationship with the community.

"I don't want people to think of it, though, that it's some stunt or that it's some public relations spin," he said.

To Mack, today will be anything but a stunt. He already feels an improved relationship with at least one police officer.

"When Chief Kerlikowske agreed to it, right there it made my relationship with him even stronger, it made my respect for him even greater," he said.

## **TASER COMPLAINTS**

Among the controversial incidents involving Taser use in Seattle are:

- February 2002 -- Police shoot and kill Shawn Maxwell, who was armed with a sword, after a Taser is ineffective. Police say the clothes he wore prevented the probes from contacting his skin.
- March 2003 -- Officers arresting an unruly bar patron on Mardi Gras used a Taser on him several times, prompting him to file an excessive force complaint. Police contend the multiple Taser shootings were needed because the man continued to resist arrest. A citizen review board asks that the department review its policies.
- July 2003 -- Officers shoot a teenager with a Taser several times after a traffic stop, resulting in a claim against the city by the teen's family.

## **A NON-LETHAL POLICE WEAPON**

In a public demonstration today, Seattle police Chief Gil Kerlikowske and Carl Mack, president of the Seattle chapter of the NAACP, will be shot with the voltage equal to that of M-26 Tasers in an educational event meant to show the effects of the device. The Police Department and the local NAACP have received several complaints about Taser use, though police officials say the device causes no permanent damage.

<b>Distance to target</b>	2 ft	5 ft	7 ft	10 ft	15 ft	21ft
<b>Probe spread</b>	3"	8"	12"	17"	25"	35"



### Use of Tasers in Seattle

- ▶ More than 200 patrol officers carry Tasers.
- ▶ Seattle officers have used Tasers 119 times so far this year.

Source: Seattle Police Department; Taser International

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

### How Tasers work

- **TECHNOLOGY:** Tasers use compressed nitrogen to shoot two electrically charged probes at an attacker. When the probes connect with a target, they release up to 14 watts (about 50,000 volts) of electric pulses for up to five seconds, which stun by causing the muscles to contract uncontrollably.
- **POWER:** Gun runs on eight standard AA batteries. Studies show the electrical charges cause no long-term damage to target.
- **IMPACT:** Target is immobilized in less than half a second. Effects of the shock last several minutes.
- **TRACKING:** A data port on the back of the gun stores each time and date it was fired.
- **BACKUP:** If the probes fail to hit the target, there are two stun electrodes on the front of the unit which can be used as a stun gun.



### Seattle Police Chief, NAACP Leader Zapped

September 17, 2004

By KOMO Staff & News Services

SEATTLE - Local NAACP leader Carl Mack had one word of advice after police staged a demonstration so he could find out what a 50,000-volt jolt from a Taser feels like: "Comply." Actually, he had two words, but the first isn't printable.

Mack and fellow volunteer Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske were held up by two officers each Friday and hit with two-second Taser bursts, administered through alligator clips attached to their shirts. Mack stiffened and cursed. Kerlikowske groaned and slumped. Then - as had been predicted - they shook off the effects and spoke with reporters. "As soon as it's over, it's over," Officer Tom Burns, a Taser trainer, had explained.

"It's very painful," Kerlikowske said. "You can't move, you couldn't blink if you wanted to. ... There are shock waves going through your body. It's a scary feeling." Mack said he felt a burning sensation where the electricity entered his body. The pulsing "affected every muscle in my body. It takes everything away from you." "I've never felt anything like that in my life," he said. "You can't control anything."

Mack had asked for the zapping, saying it would help him better understand the weapon and deal with complaints about alleged Taser abuse. It also increased his respect for Kerlikowske, he said. "The chief said, 'Well, I've never been tased as well, so if you'll do it, I'll do it.'" Mack said he was grateful that while he had initially wanted a full 5-second burst, "the chief talked me into two."

The Tasers contain computer chips that log each use - date, time, frequency - to provide what Officer Chris Myers called "an impartial witness," so allegations of abusive multiple use can be easily checked. Any weapon can be abused "in a sick kind of way," Mack said. But if the weapon's computerized log refutes a complainant's account, "his credibility is gone." All Taser use is reviewed, said Myers, also a Taser trainer. The department has 220 Tasers and they're used an average of about 13 times a month.

The weapon became part of the agency's non-lethal arsenal after an officer killed an armed and mentally ill black man, David Walker, in April 2000. Walker's death and those of several other black men killed by officers have raised concerns about racism and racial profiling. "I think some of those lives could have been saved with this technology," Mack said. He said he would not call himself a fan of the Taser, "But if it comes to tasing versus death, I would take the option of tasing."

Mack and Kerlikowske experienced "contact" Taser use. In the field, an officer can press the open end of the device against an offender and pull the trigger to launch a 5-second Taser burst of 50,000 volts. All officers trained in Taser use are zapped with it to learn how it feels.

The devices also can be fitted with a cartridge to fire a pair of nitrogen-propelled darts that trail 21-foot copper wires. Both must strike the target to complete an electrical circuit. Used that way, "it's a single-shot weapon" with no second chance if an officer misses, Myers said.

Mack said he could appreciate that an officer facing an erratic armed offender in heavy clothing may rely on his handgun instead - or that a handcuffed defendant in a patrol car may warrant a reminder from the Taser if he is kicking out the car windows.

## KOMO NEWS

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