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UISG supports Tasers for Public Safety

By Jennifer Sturm
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Nicholas Tremmel/The Daily Iowan
Chuck Green, Assistant Vice President and Director of Public Safety, describes situations where his officers were unequipped to handle dangerous situations. Public Safety is asking to be supplied with Air Tasers in order to better protect the community.

UI Public Safety officers received a crucial show of support in their quest to become a more powerful police force on Tuesday, as members of UI Student Government backed a proposal to arm them with Tasers. A majority of the three Senates voted in favor, saying officers need the arms in order to protect themselves. UISG represents the largest of three campus constituencies Public Safety Director Chuck Green was asked to contact about the proposal before the university will ask the state of Iowa Board of Regents for the change.

"The Tasers are an energy weapon that utilizes compressed nitrogen to shoot two small probes up to 21 feet at a speed of 135 feet per second," Green said of the weapons, which cost \$500 apiece.

When the probes make contact with a target, the Taser transmits electrical pulses along the wires and into the body of the target through up to two inches of clothing,

Green said. The result is an instant loss of the person's neuromuscular control and any ability to perform coordinated action, he said.

The Taser resolution passed despite a litany of concerns voiced by UISG President Nick Klenske, who said the arms could lead to a more hostile atmosphere. He also wondered if the arms were 100 percent nonlethal.

Currently, Public Safety officers are armed with pepperspray, a bullet-proof vest, and a night stick for their protection. UI is the only Big Ten school without lethal weapons on campus, Green said.

Because of the potentially dangerous calls the officers answer, some have left the force in the past because they have not felt safe, Green said during a presentation to the student assembly Tuesday night.

Green cited the case of when his officers found Jonathon Memmer -- who has been charged with two murders in Iowa City -- in the UI Field House.

"When officers found him, he turned around and said 'I'm the one you're looking for. I'm not armed.' And the officers thought, 'We aren't armed, either.' I find that chilling."

After examining alternatives to lethal weapons, Tasers seemed to be the best bet, Green said.

"Air Tasers would provide Public Safety officers with another option than those currently available to them," Green said. "An armed assailant could be stopped from harming others or himself."

The difference between the Iowa City police and Public Safety is the police officers carry lethal weapons. "Our officers are trained the same as law officers," Green said.

UISG also decided to support Public Safety request to change its name to University Police in an attempt to make people realize the department also has the authority to stop people and arrest them.

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