



MEDIA RELEASE

Tasers a costly option, in more ways than one

13 March 2012

Issuing double-barrelled Tasers, an untried model, to Victoria Police is a risky decision that will generate significant costs for the force in terms of both money and reputation, according to Smart Justice for Young People.

A community legal centre report from 2010 highlighted the problematic use of Tasers by Victoria Police units in the past, including incidents where Tasers were used to gain compliance, used multiple times on individuals and used on people who were not armed or were in police custody.

Victoria Police conducted a 12-month trial with a single barrel Taser, the X26, in two regional locations, followed by an evaluation that has not been publicly released.

“Our concern is that the Taser is going to become a first-option for police, in the way that capsicum spray has become a tool of compliance. We hear many cases of young people being sprayed when they pose no physical threat to police and we fear that Tasers will be used in the same way,” Tiffany Overall, spokesperson for Smart Justice for Young People said.

Supporters say that Tasers are a safer alternative to firearms however, evidence from Australia and overseas shows young people are at a higher risk of injury or death from a Taser due to their smaller body mass. Those with heart conditions and those affected by drugs and alcohol are also at greater risk of death or injury.

“Claiming that Tasers are a non-lethal option is a fallacy. There have been numerous deaths in Australia caused by Tasers, many of which resulted from police misusing the weapons. The fact that the double-barrelled model was not trialled by Victoria Police and that we are yet to see the results of the X26 trial is further cause for concern.

“Cameras installed on the guns are not the solution. In other jurisdictions, the cameras have been known to fail or to be blocked by the officers’ hand or another part of the weapon. We’d like to see police issued with strict instructions on the use of Tasers against young people as an absolute last resort,” Ms Overall said.

The cost of issuing Tasers to all Victoria Police is estimated to be approximately \$12 million.

“Tasers will cost more than just Victoria Police’s reputation. \$12 million is a huge sum and only adds to the cost of 1,700 new police officers promised by the State Government. Devoting this amount of money to early intervention and prevention services, especially in mental health, would greatly reduce the government’s law and order bill,” Ms Overall said.

For further comment contact Tiffany Overall: 9611 2422, tiffany@youthlaw.asn.au

Smart Justice for Young People represents over 30 organisations from the youth, legal and community sectors advocating for smart, evidence-based approaches to youth justice.

For more information on the use of Tasers in Victoria, see the Federation of Community Legal Centres’ *The Taser Trap: Is Victoria falling for it?* available at: www.fclc.org.au/public_resource_details.php?resource_id=1668