



### **Taser use is set to expand all over Ontario:**

In August 2013, Ontario approved the use of Tasers for all front line police officers.

COPKA asked S/Sgt. Paul Dowdall of Killaloe/Whitney OPP how often Tasers have been deployed since they were brought here in 2006, and under what circumstances they were used. He replied: ***“Those operational questions are not for release based on our non-existent reporting paradigm with COPKA”***. Currently, only 5 Killaloe/Whitney officers carry the Taser. Under the new rules, another 16 could be eligible.

### **Taser dangers:**

Amnesty International reports more than 550 deaths associated with Taser use since 2001. Taser shocks frequently lead to a variety of secondary injuries including fractures. On Aug 28, 2013 an 80-yr old Mississauga woman suffered a broken hip when she fell as she was tasered.

The 50,000 volt Taser shock has been linked to cardiac arrest, respiratory distress and seizures. An officer can't know if a suspect has a heart condition, pacemaker, defibrillator, is pregnant or asthmatic, or is using prescription or recreational drugs.

When asked how officers determine if it is 'safe' to taser someone, Dowdall responded: ***“Officers can only take into account information available at a point in time and act in the interest of public safety (public safety includes: officers, public at large and the subject). I am sure, if you (or one of your family members) were threatened by an intruder in your home, you would consider a health information questionnaire impractical before the officer took action to save your life. Requirement for health information status prior to the application of force (any force on the continuum) does not exist in current legislation or policy.”***

Police often try to justify the Taser as a way to save lives. If the Taser was a risk-free weapon and if it was only used as a last resort prior to the use of a sidearm, the police argument would make sense. But the Taser has the unpredictable potential to cause serious injury or even death.

Once they have the Taser, police use it more and more often, frequently in situations where such force is unjustifiable. It's easy to understand why. The Taser eliminates risk to the officer, while giving him/her overwhelming power to cause intense pain or disable another person. It's a convenient way to get immediate compliance with police commands. In 2008, the Killaloe/Whitney OPP admitted to tasing an unarmed man in one of their holding cells. It's clear that a Taser can easily be abused.

### **Tasers costs:**

Ontario has not provided any money to municipalities for expanding Taser use. Our local municipal

budgets are already stretched to the limit by the high costs of policing. When COPKA inquired, Dowdall would not comment on the potential costs of expanded Taser use. These costs would include the purchase of Tasers, their maintenance and re-arming, plus initial and ongoing officer training.

**The de-escalation solution:**

***“In our view, resolution through de-escalation should be the goal... Tasers are harmful weapons and the risk of excessive and unjustified force resulting in unnecessary serious injury is real.”*** S. Pillay, Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA).

Effective de-escalation takes calm, respectful communication and negotiation. It achieves control through cooperation, not force, building better relationships between the police and the public they serve. De-escalation should be the first choice in all but the most extreme situations. Contrary to Ottawa police claims, the Taser is not a de-escalation tool.

***“What is really needed is better training for police... in how to de-escalate confrontations without resorting to any weapon, including a taser.”*** Editor, Toronto Star, Sept 6, 2013.

COPKA joins the Ontario Ombudsman and CCLA in recommending an increase in de-escalation practices instead of an increase in Taser use. We ask that officers get the same number of training hours in de-escalation as they get in use of force. We encourage the police administration to reward officers for using de-escalation and we ask that the OPP report any use of the Taser to the municipalities.

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*COPKA is a citizen's group dedicated to improving the relationship between the Killaloe/Whitney OPP Detachment and the public they serve. Find out more at [www.copka.ca](http://www.copka.ca) .*

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