

Senate Passes Limits On Stun Gun Use By Police

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Police would be required to take special training and abide by new restrictions on the use of dart-firing stun guns under a bill passed Thursday by the Senate.

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The bill would limit use of the weapons that deliver a high-voltage electrical jolt to situations in which arrest suspects or others in custody resist an officer, either passively or actively.

Even in those cases, stun guns could be used only if the subject has the apparent ability to physically threaten the officer or others or is preparing or attempting to flee. The restrictions also would apply to correctional and probation officers.

"Once we get the policies in, we're not going to have folks going around willy-nilly and stun-gun folks," said the bill's sponsor, Sen. Steve Wise, R-Jacksonville.

The measure (SB 214) passed 37-0. It next goes to the House where a similar bill (HB 303) was awaiting a floor vote.

The most commonly use stun guns are made by Taser International Inc., an Arizona-based company. At least 167 people have died across the country after being shocked by police since 1999, according to a count by The Arizona Republic newspaper.

Medical examiners have cited stun guns in 27 deaths, saying that they were a cause of death in five cases, a contributing factor in 17 cases and could not be ruled out in five cases, the paper also found.

Taser International denies its products are solely to blame in any deaths, arguing that drugs, health conditions or other factors have been the cause.

The bill also would require police to receive at least four hours of stun gun training as part of their basic skills course. Police, correctional and probation officers who have not received that training would have to take a four-hour course before being allowed to use the

weapons.

All officers authorized to use stun guns also would have to take an annual refresher course of at least one hour.

The Senate added an amendment offered by Sen. Gary Siplin, D-Orlando, that would require school resource officers to file detailed reports, including the age, gender and race of children they have used stun guns on at elementary schools.

"Tasering children is on the rise," said Sen. Frederica Wilson, D-Miami.

"Something needs to be done."

She cited a recent case of a child suffering a seizure after police used a stun gun.

The school stun gun information would be forward to the state Health Department for analysis.

Siplin offered but withdrew another amendment that would have allocated \$200,000 for a state study on the effects of stun guns. Adopting the amendment would have forced the bill back into an appropriations committee. Siplin said in withdrawing the amendment that legislative leaders had assured him a way would be found to do such a study.

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