

# LESS LETHAL WEAPONS:

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



## Projectile Electric Shock Weapons (PESW)

What are they and how can they be used lawfully?

Projectile electric shock weapons (PESWs), commonly known as “Tasers” (the former name of one of the manufacturers and the current name of their device) are designed to incapacitate a person who presents a threat of death or serious injury to a police officer or another person which cannot be contained by less extreme options. They allow police to intervene from a distance of up to 10 meters.

### HOW DO PESWs WORK?

PESWs can deliver an electric current to the body in two different modes:

- **Dart-firing:** two barbs attached to the PEWS by wire are fired at the person from a distance, supposed to puncture the skin and stay attached to the person. The electric current delivered causes instant neuromuscular incapacitation, temporarily preventing the person from acting. Some PESWs have an automatic cut-off point, while others allow the current to flow as long as the trigger remains pulled.
- **Drive stun:** the PESW is applied directly to the body, causing extreme pain. There is no incapacitating effect because the points of contact are too close to create an electric circuit. **This mode should be prohibited!**

### EFFECTS & RISKS

#### Warranted effects

- ✓ Temporary neuromuscular incapacitation.
- ✓ Extreme pain.
- ✓ Two small punctures in the skin.
- ✓ Some pain as a result of falling to the ground.

#### Unwarranted effects & risks

Potentially lethal consequences as a result of:

- ✗ Heart rhythm problems – particularly in case of heightened sensitivity because of old or young age, use of drugs or alcohol, pre-existing heart disease, or if the darts hit too close to the heart;
- ✗ Increased agitation and physical stress reactions leading to an adverse effect on the heart (in particular person undergoing a mental health crisis);
- ✗ Intense muscle contraction affecting respiratory muscles, leading to respiratory or cardiac arrest in the case of pre-existing heart disease, or in case of repeated or prolonged discharges;
- ✗ The build-up of blood acid (acidosis), leading to cardiac arrest;
- ✗ Injuries as a result of the uncontrolled fall, including serious injuries or death, depending on where the person is standing (on a roof, close to open water) or in case of certain preconditions (older person, person with a disability).

### WHEN CAN PESWs BE USED LAWFULLY?

#### THRESHOLD AND PURPOSE

- ✓ In dart-firing mode, In particular dangerous “stand-off”- situations **to protect against a threat of death or serious injury with a view to avoid the need to resort to a firearm**, and only if non-violent means as well as a lower degree of force by other means have failed, or are likely to be ineffective.
- ✓ Only with weapons that have an automatic cut-off point.
- ✓ In case of repeated discharge, each discharge must be justified on its own to assess whether it meets the criteria of necessity and proportionality.

#### PROHIBITIONS

- ✗ When a person offers only passive resistance or does not present a serious threat.
- ✗ When the person has already been brought under control.
- ✗ As a means of punishment.
- ✗ In the presence of flammable goods (such as pepper-spray, tear gas, and fuel stations).

## HOW CAN PESWs BE USED LAWFULLY?

### Do's

- ✓ After a warning with sufficient time granted to comply with the order.
- ✓ Aiming at the larger muscle mass of the body: upper legs, back, or belly.
- ✓ Discharge must stop immediately when the person is complying, is under control or does not present a threat anymore.

### Don'ts

- ✗ In dart-firing mode aiming at the head, neck, spinal cord, groin area, or chest / close to the heart.
- ✗ Repeated and/or prolonged discharges to be avoided.
- ✗ **Drive-stun mode must be prohibited!**

## WEAPONS TO BE PROHIBITED

### Devices that:

- ✗ Do not have a cut-off point.
- ✗ Do not record every use.
- ✗ Can only function in drive-stun mode (stun guns, stun batons).

## PESWs AND PROTESTS



PESWs are not a suitable weapon for public order situations: in such a volatile situation it is difficult to carefully target a person presenting a serious threat and the use of such as weapon bears a particular risk of escalation.

## PESWs AND CHILDREN



**The use of any weapon against children must be avoided!**

- ✗ PESWs have not been and for ethical reasons cannot be tested on children! Children are more likely to suffer serious consequences and harm, because of their weaker cardiac system, thinner muscle mass with the current getting closer to the heart, stronger pain, and risk of psychological trauma.
- ✗ Children will rarely present a threat serious enough to justify the use of a PESWs: In most cases when a child presents a threat to an officer, it should be possible to address this with far less dangerous means.

## INSTRUCTIONS AND TRAINING



**PESWs are not a standard tool for ordinary day-to-day policing and should only be used in exceptional circumstances by specially-trained officers).** Projectile electric shock weapons should only be introduced after a thorough review to determine if there is a legitimate operational need for their deployment which would comply with international human rights law and standards on the use of force.

Authorities must provide clear regulations, instructions and training on when and how to use PESWs properly, including:

- ✓ underscoring and not downplaying the potential dangerousness of the weapon;
- ✓ how to minimize harm;
- ✓ and when it is not appropriate to use PESWs.

**The use against persons who are only passively resisting and the use in drive stun mode must be explicitly prohibited.**

Only certified police officials, trained by certified police trainers, not just the manufacturer of the weapon, should be authorized to carry PESWs. PESWs, as all weapons, should undergo rigorous, independent testing to ensure they are safe and appropriate for use in compliance with human rights laws and standards. Any equipment with a significant risk of causing excessive or otherwise unwarranted injury or harm should not be used. Each use of a PESWs should be recorded, and law enforcement officials must be held accountable for any unlawful use.

## MORE INFORMATION



- Amnesty's Projectile Electric Shock Weapons [position paper](#) and [summary](#)
- Amnesty's [Use of Force: : Guidelines for Implementation of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials](#) and [summary](#)
- [UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials](#)
- Amnesty's [Police and Human Rights resources website](#)

