

Force leads the way in weapons protection



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Nottinghamshire is the first force in the country to use smart software to track its Tasers and keep them stored safely and securely.

The weapons are being kept in sophisticated cabinets which can only be opened by authorised officers after a scanner reads their unique Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) card and once they enter an electronic password.

Computer software then verifies their authorisation and operational competency before calculating which Taser they should be given, based on the level of use of each device.

The Intelligent Drawer Armoury System (iDAS) automatically records the issue and return of weapons. But it also provides a complete service history for each Taser, generates audit reports for supervisors, prevents unauthorised issue and can even tell how often an officer has been issued with and fired the device.

The cabinets rely on RFID technology. This is where radio waves are used to identify and track objects by matching a signal given off from an antenna stored inside.

There are four cabinets sited at police stations across the force and they have been developed in conjunction with software firm JML Software Solutions and RFID companies RFIP Ltd and Tagsys.

A similar system already exists to track the usage of guns by firearms officers in armouries throughout the force.

Around 160 officers in Notts are authorised to carry Tasers while on duty. These include all Firearms Support Group officers (FSG) and some officers in specialist units such as Territorial Support Groups (TSG), ANPR, Motorway Patrol and dog handlers.

Nigel Rippon, force systems administrator, said: "Because of the size of the county we chose to store Tasers at several key stations that could provide ease of access and deployment.

"This raised the issue of security of Tasers, combined with the need for a robust system of auditing—issuing and return, usage and maintenance."

The force considered using manual locking cabinets, together with paper audit records, but believed such a system would allow for errors if paperwork was not completed properly.

The system went live in June this year and includes a total of 60 Taser drawers. Upon arriving for a shift, an officer presents his or her RFID card to a reader installed nearby, and inputs his or her password number on a keypad.



One of the secure cabinets for storing Tasers



A Taser seen being taken out of one of the drawers

The ID number is captured by the RFID reader and then verified by computer software in order to confirm whether the number and password match, as well as whether that officer has the training and competency necessary to be authorised for Taser use.

If there is a match, a screen then displays a series of questions and instructions, including asking the officer if he or she has consumed alcohol, and advising that individual regarding the safe usage of Tasers.

Once the officer has responded to these messages, the software calculates which Taser in the cabinet should be used next, based on each device's level of usage. The appropriate drawer then opens, and the officer can remove the Taser and cartridges.

Upon returning the weapon, the officer again presents his or her ID card and password, signs onto the screen—thereby confirming that he or she is the officer returning the Taser, and not another individual—and then answers another series of questions, such as whether the weapon was used (and, if so, the number of shots fired) and whether it operated properly.

The responses are stored in the software, enabling the force to keep track of each Taser's condition. In addition, if the officer reports that the Taser failed to operate properly, an alert is sent to the individual responsible for maintaining the devices. In the meantime, the drawer for that Taser remains locked to anyone except the individual authorised to maintain it.

The system also includes a safety feature to ensure tags are not removed from a Taser and returned to the drawer, thus indicating the Taser was returned when it really wasn't.

Nigel said the cabinets also allow the force to track the behaviour of officers (for example, those who may be using Tasers more than others, and who might require additional training).

"It has provided an opportunity to securely store weapons in remote locations whilst maintaining a creditable secure facility that can be monitored from remote locations," he added.

"The cabinets have provided a secure, keyless facility that has removed the need for paper records and manual issue."

Since the system went live in April Tasers have been issued for patrol use more than 9,000 times.

"All officers have adapted well to the new process with minimal instruction and supervision," Nigel added.

Assistant Chief Constable Paul Broadbent said: "Tasers provide police officers with an effective, non-lethal alternative to firearms and they have fast become an extremely important tool in the equipment available to us.

"But just as with firearms, it is vital they are stored safely and securely, with access restricted only to those officers trained and authorised to use them.

"The methods we are using across the force are innovative and are a great example of how we are using technology to help us overcome what could otherwise be a complex, drawn out process."

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