Danger, High Voltage! Shocking Truth about Miami Police

The Miami Beach Police Department will now be using Tasers on civilians exclusively. Chief Daniel J. Oates was apparently appalled by the department’s training program, which includes shocking officers with a Taser before they are allowed to carry them on the streets.

Ever since Oates took office, he’s been making promises to change Taser policies. Being a man of his word, now he has, though in his own way. “I have been shocked by the Taser, and it is extremely unpleasant. I don’t believe an officer needs to go through that experience in order to be well trained how to use the weapon. I have instructed Lt. London to discontinue this practice,” Chief Oates writes in an e-mail to the department. What a buzzkill. He did, however, allow officers to be Tased voluntarily as part of their training.

If the now discontinued practice of applying the weapon to the officers before letting them use it was meant to illustrate it’s ‘unpleasantness’ and make policemen think twice before using a Taser on another human being, it has failed miserably. Jokes aside,Taser stats are sky-high in Miami, and most incidents look more like police brutality than anything else. The worst case, undoubtedly, was the killing of 18-year-old Israel Hernandez in 2013. He was caught tagging an abandoned building and paid with his life for a misdemeanor. “It worries me how the chief talks about changes, and the changes only benefit the police. He has to put himself in our shoes and understand what my family has gone through. It’s time to make radical changes,” said. Israel Hernandez Sr., in an interview with Fusion. “We were positive about his early announcements. We felt that he was honest and he truly wanted to change Miami Beach police for good, but it was just a show and a lie. The Hernandez family is totally destroyed and deeply disappointed,” he said.

Are Miami Cops Just too Lazy to Use their Words Instead of Brute Force?

Initially, Tasers were meant to decrease use of deadly force, particularly reduce police-involved shootings. But instead they “are being used in a myriad of incidents when normally use of force wouldn't even be necessary," says Justin Mazzola of Amnesty International. Suspected criminals aren’t the only victims of overly-enthusiastic Tasering – more often than not charges are dropped or never even filed. Among other regular victims are junkies, homeless people, the mentally disabled and even children. In 2004 two officers failed to calm down a six-year-old boy having a tantrum, so they Tasered him. Later that year Miami-Dade cops caught a 12-year-old skipping school, so they Tasered her, too. Two weeks after that, officers caught a 16-year-old at a joy-ride in a stolen car, so they decided to Taser him, allegedly after he was already cuffed.

Tasers were given to officers as a non-lethal means of sel-defence against violent suspects, but became a magical instrument for solving almost any problem. Homeless man sleeping on a bench in José Martí Park? Mentally challenged 20-year-old lady taking off her clothes? Teenager being rude to a cop? Kid misbehaving? Taser them all! And definately Taser suspects obviously high on stimulating drugs, because sending an electric shock through an already over-stressed heart isn't life-threatening at all.

Police represantatives keep saying that they don't overuse Tasers. "It is a nonlethal weapon that is used to stabilize a situation if an individual becomes violent, in lieu of getting into a fistfight or using deadly force... It's saved the lives of officers and the community alike," says Miami Police Sgt. Freddie Cruz. Officers maybe, but some late members of the community would beg to differ. Countless examples clearly show that many street cops have an interesting view of what qualifies as violence and threatening behavior. And, according to Mazzola, while Taser-violence goes up, gun-violence doesn't even go down.

"Some officers have itchy trigger fingers and are abusing people," says Daniel Suarez of the Civilian Investigative Panel (CIP).

New Times investigation showed over 3000 incidents between years 2007 and 2014 in Miami, 11 with lethal outcomes. And these are just the ones reported by the police. Surely, deadly cases of Taser abuse are easy to trace, but what about the rest? If the victims and witnesses stay silent, no one ever even finds out about many cases, despite the chips in every Taser that shows when it's been activated. But why bother the department with extra paper work? Apparently, to some officers, Tasering has become the equivalent of a light telling-off not even worthy of reporting. Many Taser-happy officers have questionable history: abuse of the weapon, violent tendencies, corruption. One of them, George Diaz, was involved in three deadly police-shootimgs, two of them unexplained. Iincluding the killing of Corey McNeal, who was shot 27 times.

Hopefully, if not the officers, than at least their superiors will review the Miami police departments' take on abuse of power, policework and basic human decency, and enforce proper use of the Taser, which is indeed, as Chief Oates pointed out, "extreemely unpleasant." Of course, many Taser victims are indeed commiting a petty crime. But does failure to be a pillar of the community mean the civil right to not sustain bodily harm from law enforcers is revoked in Miami?