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Mack: Taser testing device could bring new jobs

By Patrick McArdle
STAFF WRITER | January 14, 2014

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Patrick McArdle / STAFF PHOTO

Kenneth Stethem displays a machine he developed that police can use to test Tasers.

ARLINGTON — Kenneth Stethem, a former Navy SEAL, has developed a machine that police can use to test Tasers and make sure they're operating correctly, and Stethem is hoping the machines will be required across the state and manufactured at Mack Molding.

Stethem met Monday with most of the members of Bennington County's legislative delegation at Mack's corporate headquarters in Arlington to explain his proposal and seek their support. Stethem said he believed testing Tasers, which he called "electroshock weapons" or ESWs, should be as standard as testing and calibrating radar guns or blood-alcohol breath-test devices.

The Aegis Mark 23 Axeos, also called an ESW analyzer, appeared simple to operate during demonstration. A law-enforcement officer signs in to use the device, so there is a record of who is testing the Taser. The Taser is inserted into docking port and the trigger is pulled.

Within seconds, the test is complete and the results are logged so the law enforcement agency has a record of when the Tasers

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were tested as well as the results.

While Stethem, founder and CEO of Aegis, admitted that he stands to benefit from the idea, he said profit wasn't his main consideration.

"My company was a cause before it was a company and I want you to understand that. Price isn't going to be a reason why this shouldn't be done," he said.

Stethem said each unit will cost a law enforcement department less than \$10,000.

During his presentation, Stethem made reference to several cases where police used a Taser, which is supposed to be a nonlethal weapon, and the targeted suspect died, including Macadam Mason, 39, of Thetford, who died in June 2012. Testing Tasers regularly would protect the public, police departments and governments because they would provide evidence that the weapon was working as expected at the time of use.

Jeff Somple, president of Mack's northern operations, told the legislators that many of them had asked Mack executives if there was anything they could do to support the manufacturer. Somple said supporting a law that would require regular Taser testing would make their use safer.

He also called the ESW analyzer "very important for Mack Molding."

"It's a very nice manufacturing opportunity for us, so not only could Vermont be doing something really interesting and good on the legislative side but also could be good for our economy. These units are built completely in Vermont. We mold the plastic, we make the metal, we put the entire product together, we test it, it goes out the door," he said.

While Somple said it was too early to say how many jobs it could create, he estimated that "if this thing takes off," Mack could add 30 to 60 jobs to support its manufacture.

State Sen. Richard Sears, D-Bennington County, said he expected a law that mandates testing could expand the use of Tasers to departments, such as the Bennington Police Department, which don't use them now.

"There's no department in the state that doesn't want to be like the best department. I don't sense that Wilmington or even Bennington wants to not have the same advantages as other departments. I suspect once this becomes more regulated with these ideas, we'll see more use of (Tasers)," he said.

Stethem said there are already trials planned for the equipment in Canada later this month and in Ohio in February.

A website for the ESW analyzer can be found online at

www.aegisaxeos.com.

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