

## Locally-manufactured device measures output of Tasers

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ARLINGTON -- Electroshock weapons -- more commonly known by the brand name Taser -- are used by law enforcement to subdue a suspect without a fight. The handheld devices shoot electricity into the body to incapacitate a person. Surprisingly the weapons aren't regulated by any agency.

"It's kind of scary to think Tasers are not measured," said Jeff Somple, president of Northern Operations for Mack Molding Company.

The Arlington manufacturer has been contracted to make a product called the Aegis Axeos ESW Waveform Recorder/Analyzer -- a device that measures the output of Tasers.

Local lawmakers were invited to visit Mack's Arlington headquarters Monday to hear from Kenneth J. Stethem, CEO of Rockville, Md.-based Aegis, about the product.

A former Navy SEAL, Stethem has developed the first patented waveform analyzer that can quickly measure the output of an electroshock weapon.

"There's a variability with the output of Tasers. These weapons aren't checked," said Stethem, who cited a recent evaluation of the devices used by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police that showed 80 percent of their ESWs were out of spec.

A weapon that's malfunctioning could put law enforcement or the public at risk. Taser emissions have caused cardiac arrest, which can be fatal, according to the American Heart Association.

The body's response to electroshock weapons depends on the electrical characteristics of the weapon as well as how it is used, according to a report from the Council for Canadian Academies.

In Vermont, Macadam Mason, 39, of Thetford, died in June 2012 after being shot in the chest with a Taser by a Vermont State Trooper.

At that time, according to a report by [WCAX.com](http://www.wcax.com), 207 Vermont State troopers were armed with Tasers and used them 32 times in 2011. ESWs are used by more than 11,500 police agencies in more than 44 countries, according to a recent report by ABC News.

With the Aegis ESW Analyzer, an officer can test a Taser before he or she reports for duty.

Stethem demonstrated the device, which is roughly as big as a dictionary and includes a touch screen and a port for the weapon, to a group that included Sen. Dick Sears (D-Bennington), Rep. Mary Morrissey (R-Bennington), Rep. Brian Campion (D-Bennington), Rep. Anne Mook (D-Bennington), Rep. Cynthia Browning (D-Arlington) and others.

The demonstration was timely as legislation now before the Vermont House, House Bill 225, "proposes to establish a statewide policy on the training requirements for electronic control devices," according to the bill summary.

Stethem said he would like to see performance standards for ESWs become part of that bill or become required by the Law Enforcement Advisory Board or the Criminal Justice Training Council.

Sears asked, "How do we get it to small departments like Wilmington, Winhall and Bennington? I'm sure your product is not free."

The cost of the device is under \$10,000 and includes product training and a 30- to 40-day pilot program to get started, according to Stethem. He said his company will work with law enforcement agencies to make sure the device is affordable.

Sears asked if Stethem had discussed the product with state Public Safety Commissioner Kevin Flynn. Stethem said not yet, but it was on his agenda. He said he was headed to Montpelier after his visit at Mack to speak with more legislators.

"This is about life and the effect good policy can have on reducing risks and providing good officer safety," Stethem said.

"Do you do any training with the police academies?" asked Morrissey. Stethem said that was also part of his company's plan.

Currently, there is "no government oversight," he said. "Law enforcement, if they are going to use these (electroshock weapons) should require the manufacturers to tell them what should be coming out. If you don't test these things, you don't know."

Campion asked if there's a way to vary the effect of a Taser on a victim to take into account different heights and weights.

Stethem said there's no one "magic waveform" that comes out of each weapon. It's variable and that's part of the reason it needs to be measured.

In the Cincinnati, Ohio, area, there have been five recent deaths attributed to law enforcement Taser discharges, he said. Law enforcement in Hamilton County, Ohio, is going to start a pilot program using Aegis ESW Analyzers in February using devices manufactured at Mack Molding, according to Stethem.

The police department in the city of Oakland, Calif., recently tested their ESWs and found a nine percent failure rate, Stethem said.

Somple noted the Aegis contract is an important one for privately-owned Mack Molding, which is a contract manufacturer of custom plastics.

"This is a really nice manufacturing opportunity for us," Somple said. He said he didn't know how many manufacturing jobs this could create in Vermont should the product take off, and the legislation be successful. If it does it could "easily be 30 to 60," Somple said.

The first two Aegis ESW Analyzer units built at Mack Molding are going to the RCMP, Stethem said.

Sears asked if anyone else sells or uses products like this one.

Stethem said Mack is the "only place in the world where these are being produced."

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