

April 3rd, 2013

## "Taser Happy" Officers No Longer Under Watchful Eye

For six years, the Orange County Sheriff's Office has been under the watchful eye of the U.S. Department of Justice for their handling of Tasers. The U.S. DOJ announced on April 2 that they were ending their oversight of the OC Sheriff's Office because they complied with the U.S. DOJ directives.

In Jan. 2007, the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ accepted a complaint of a pattern of excessive force related to Tasers, the first of its kind since law enforcement began using the devices in 1999. The DOJ indicated that the Sheriff's Office has lessened its use of the weapons and decreased the use of force overall.

The DOJ investigation lasted through the terms of Sheriff Kevin Beary and Sheriff Jerry Demings. The department complimented the sheriff's office on their progress in ensuring that deputies follow constitutional practices for the residents of Orange County and originally noted their compliance in Oct. 2011. However, they continued to observe the agency until March 31.

Sheriff Demings expressed his commitment to the new improvements and agreed to move forward with the same efforts. A failure to follow the recommendations issued by the federal government in Aug. 2008 could have resulted in a lawsuit against the Sheriff's Office.

In 2003, Sheriff Beary advocated for the use of Tasers and even appeared in advertisements for the company. The following year, he submitted to stunning by a Taser to show that the electrical current did not harm those who are shocked with the weapon.

However, between 2001 and 2008, five people died after Orange County law enforcement personnel used Tasers on them. The issue made national headlines after an 11-year-old girl at a local middle school photographed a crime scene in 2008 when a man shouted he would jump more than two-dozen feet onto an expressway. Three people were shocked with Tasers.

The DOJ emphasized that Tasers should not be used on a number of individuals, including pre-teens, the elderly, pregnant women, anyone with a disability and a number of other individuals. People should not be threatened, poked or awakened through the use of Tasers.

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