



Sneak peek at city Taser audit

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By Jessica Willey

HOUSTON (KTRK) -- As the city awaits an audit on Taser use by Houston police officers, we're getting a sneak peek at some of the numbers.

We are specifically looking at how many times officers are using Tasers and who are the suspects in the incidents?

We got these numbers ahead of the city controller's audit expected to come out any day. It shows 64% of the Taser incidents since the implementation involve African Americans. In a city where less than 25% of the population is black, some say these numbers are alarming.

Though it's been three and a half years since HPD officers started carrying Tasers, community activist Deloyd Parker doesn't feel any better about it.

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"Nothing is changed, well it's changed, but it's gotten worse," he told us.

He has called for a moratorium on Taser use in the past and he renews it based on these new numbers we've obtained.

From December 3rd of 2004 to April 30th of this year, HPD's statistics show officers used their Tasers more than 1,600 times. More males are stunned with them than females and by far more African Americans.

Out of the 1,675 uses, 380 involved a Hispanic suspect, 202 were used against whites and in more than a 1,000 cases the suspect was black.

It leads Parker to one conclusion.

"Racism is a major factor in the use of the Taser," he said.

"The officers aren't really in a position where they get to pick the race of the person their Tasing," said Gary Blankinship of the

Houston Police Officers' Union.

Blankinship says officers are only reacting to the actions of others.

He dismisses the idea of racism. HPD brass does too:

"The CED is race neutral. Race or ethnicity is never justification to use or not to use a CED. The suspect's aggressive behavior is the key."

City council member Ronald Green thinks the disproportionate numbers should at least be looked at more closely.

"There may be some people who think it's just fine, but at first blush it appears there is a problem," he said.

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