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California School Abandons Electronic Tracking Program

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"among the safest alternatives available to law enforcement to subdue violent individuals."

Florida state senators Gary Siplin and Tony Hill have called for a statewide ban on Taser guns until a study can determine how dangerous the guns are. "The only studies that have been done on Tasers thus far ha[ve] been on a pig and a dog, yet they're using 50,000 voltage on a human being," Siplin said. Siplin sponsored a bill requiring 100 hours of police training in the use of Tasers and other disabling techniques, and a proposal forbidding anyone except police officers to own, sell or even repair any type of stun gun. Hill sponsored a bill forbidding use of Tasers on all school grounds.

The Toledo, Ohio, Police Department has issued new rules prohibiting the use of Tasers on a suspect who is handcuffed, as well as on

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juveniles, the elderly, and pregnant women. In addition, anyone who is shot by a Taser must be examined by medical personnel immediately, and no per-

son may be stunned more than four times. Similarly, the Department of Homeland Security's two largest law enforcement divisions have rejected the use of Tasers for about 20,000 agents and officers, largely because of questions about safety. Bans have been adopted by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection bureaus.

Proponents of Taser stun gun use by law enforcement believe that Tasers are a safer alternative to firearms in subduing those with violent behavior. Opponents can't understand why they would ever be used in situations when a firearm could not.

California School Abandons Electronic Tracking Program

By Maura Deady

In February, Brittan Elementary School in Sutter, Calif., terminated an experimental Radio Frequency Identification program in response to complaints from parents, the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and the Electronic Privacy Information Center.

As part of the program, students wore tags that transmitted their encrypted ID information to antennas placed above classroom doors. The teachers and administrators were then able to confirm class attendance for each period through a handheld device. Among the concerns cited were children's safety and privacy.

Brittan Elementary School Superintendent Earnie Graham said the use of the devices was a test to determine whether the technology improves campus safety. Students from kindergarten through

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eighth grade wore the RFID badges around their necks while attending school. InCom Corp. provided the devices as well as a small donation to the school in return for their participation in the program. The school ran the RFID pilot program in the summer of 2004 after it was unanimously approved by the school board, and again from January 2005 until the program's termination in February.

Complaints began when parents noticed their children wearing badges when they came home from school. According to the ACLU, parents Michael and Dawn Cantrall were among those dis-

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turbed by the RFID use. They contacted Graham in January 2005 to see if they had missed the parent meeting about the implementation of the monitoring devices at school. According to the Cantralls, Graham informed them that no parent meeting was held regarding the RFID program, and that he had the support of the school board. The Cantralls then wrote a complaint to the school, saying they feared for their children's safety and were concerned about who could access confidential information about their children, such as their home address. No immediate action was taken in response to the Cantralls' letter.

The ACLU, partnering with EFF and EPIC, also objected to the RFID program in a letter to the school's board of trustees. In this letter, the organizations urged the school to immediately reconsider what they termed an "ill-advised" experiment. They stated that there had been no reported security problems within the school and that the RFID program only had potential to "jeopardize the safety and security of students by broadcasting identity and location information to anyone with a chip reader," and to create a "prison-like atmosphere." They said such an atmosphere ultimately violates the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which "protects dignity as an essential component of being human and a condition for freedom and equality."

On February 15, 2005, a Board meeting was held and the school decided to abandon the RFID program and InCom Corp. pulled out of its agreement with the school. But not all people were happy with the Board's decision to terminate the use of the RFID program. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Tina Jones and her kindergarten

son did not see the device as a danger. Instead, her son said the badge "made him feel safer."

Despite this recent controversy, RFID devices are currently being used around the world. Schoolchildren in Osaka, Japan, are required to carry tags similar to those used in Brittan Elementary School in their backpacks. The Mexican government has implanted RFID tags in the shoulders of court officials for tracking purposes. Anyone can purchase an electronic tracking device for about \$200, plus a monthly fee of about \$20. Most of these devices are marketed as "kid-tracking" devices, while others are designed to keep tabs on pets and senior citizens.

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