

Police add 'stop sticks' to arsenal of pursuit tactics

By NICOLE MARSHALL World Staff Writer
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Tulsa police will soon have stop sticks - - spiked devices used to deflate the tires of vehicles during pursuits -- in every patrol car.

Forty-four of the devices are already available for use, but on Wednesday police officials will start distributing the 434 new ones they have bought to all patrol officers, Officer Jason Willingham said.

"The more sticks we have out there, the more opportunities we have to slow pursuits down," he said.

The spikes in the devices are designed to puncture and deflate the tires of fleeing vehicles, he explained.

"It will take a car going 100 mph down to 20 or 25 mph in a two-mile stretch," Willingham said.

The stop stick is engineered to deflate tires without causing a blowout because the spikes act as valves, releasing air at a safe, controlled rate.

"After tires deflate, you can't drive the high speeds on just rims," Willingham said.

"Metal on concrete doesn't have the same effect as rubber on concrete. That's why we drive on rubber."

High-speed police pursuits carry the risk of injury or even death to the officers, members of the public and those running from the police.



The barbs of a stop stick are shown in a tire that has been punctured.

Courtesy of Tulsa Police



Tulsa Police officer Jack Hoehner throws practice stop sticks with no barbs into the road.

SHERRY BROWN / Tulsa World

Willingham said the stop sticks "are not going to stop pursuits, but they will slow them down and make them safer."

Officer Will Dalsing said the sticks give officers another option in their arsenal of tactics.

"We follow them until they quit or we quit or they wreck," he said. "There are not a lot of choices, and this gives us one."

During a pursuit, officers place the sticks on a roadway where they believe the vehicle being sought will travel.

The stop sticks were bought with \$140,000 in federal Local Law Enforcement Block Grant money.

Once a stop stick is used, it cannot be used again. But the company that supplies them will replace each used stop stick for five years.

The department first purchased some of the devices in mid-2005. When officials decided they wanted to outfit every patrol car with the stop sticks, they tested a variety of devices to ensure they were investing in the best product.

The kind they selected has a plastic housing that ensures officer safety during deployment and removal from the roadway. It also has an 80-foot cord that allows an officer to stand a safe distance from the road.

"There are other products out there that are a lot more difficult to use," Officer Jack Hoehner said. "It doesn't matter how these land, as long as they are lying in the road."

Willingham said an officer "can have these things out and ready in 30 seconds."

"The kind we used to use would take us five minutes to get out and five, 10 minutes to get back in the case," he said. "And the old ones were huge -- about the size of a spare tire."

The quicker a stop stick is in place in the path of the fleeing vehicle, the quicker the pursuit is likely to end, police say.

Half of the police force has been trained in the use of the tire-deflating devices. Those officers will start receiving their stop sticks this week. Once the other half is trained, those officers will receive their stop sticks, Willingham said.

"Pursuits are dynamic; they are ever-changing," he said. "The bad guys don't tell us where they are going to go."

"The quicker we can get something out there on the road and get it deployed, the more likely we are to get them stopped."