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Prison Officers to Trial Tasers in Bid to Curb Violence

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— Categories: Crime



Specialist prison officers across male facilities in England and Wales will implement the trial use of Tasers in response to escalating levels of violence, as the government seeks stronger measures to restore order and safety behind bars.

The pilot programme, announced by the Ministry of Justice, comes amid newly revealed figures showing that over £20 million has been paid out in compensation over five years to both staff and inmates injured during assaults. The move marks a significant shift in how

prison security is approached, with ministers indicating that a wider rollout of Tasers may be considered depending on the trial's outcome.

The initiative will see electric stun guns issued to a specially trained national response team, tasked with handling high-risk incidents in male prisons, including riots and hostage situations. This team will be deployed to manage severe disturbances where lives could be at risk.

Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood, speaking after a demonstration of the devices in Oxfordshire, stressed that safety for both staff and inmates remains a priority. "We're already rolling out protective body armour and by trialling Tasers we're making sure staff have the tools they need to keep themselves safe," she said.

The Prison Officers' Association (POA) welcomed the trial but insisted the deployment of Tasers should have been implemented much earlier. National chairman Mark Fairhurst pointed to long-standing problems within the prison system, saying: "Prisons have been overcrowded for decades, which leads to a lack of activity spaces for prisoners, leading to boredom, drug abuse, and violence. Staff must be equipped with the personal protective equipment they need to quell violence and prevent life-changing injuries."

The rising violence is not just statistics on paper. Former prison officer Claire Lewis, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after being stabbed on duty 15 years ago, supports the careful use of Tasers. "Tasers are a great piece of kit, however, only in an environment whereby it's a planned extraction or if there's an assault on a wing," she said. Lewis, who served at HMP Frankland in County Durham, has also called for stab-proof vests to be issued as standard. "If I'd have got a vest on when I was attacked, I would not have received the serious injury I did to my back; it narrowly missed my spinal cord."

Ministry of Justice figures show a concerning rise in assaults, with staff attacks hitting record highs in the past year. A total of 232 claims were made for prisoner-on-staff assaults between 2020 and 2024, with an additional 334 for prisoner-on-prisoner violence. Disturbingly, 104 claims were also filed alleging that staff assaulted inmates.

Former staff say prison violence is becoming more extreme. One ex-officer, speaking anonymously, described inmates turning everyday items into weapons. "They used to use snooker balls in socks, now they use full cans of drinks... They make knives out of tuna cans," she said.

The Prison Service has pledged further action, including more lockdown searches in high-security facilities and the introduction of anti-drone measures to stop the flow of contraband that fuels violence.

While the trial has received backing from the POA and some frontline workers, others remain cautious. Tom Wheatley, President of the Prison Governors' Association, supports the Tasers being restricted to specialist teams. "If they were issued to all officers on a daily basis, it could carry additional risk," he said. "Certainly not issued more generally, because they form a threat item, so if somebody managed to get a Taser off a member of staff, that would be a real concern to us."

As the pilot rolls out this summer, all eyes will be on whether this controversial move can restore order in an increasingly volatile prison system.