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Prison Taser Trial Aims to Restore Order and Protect Officers

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In an effort to combat escalating violence inside men's prisons across England and

Wales, specially trained officers will begin trialing the use of Tasers this summer. The initiative comes amid growing concerns about staff safety and deteriorating conditions inside correctional facilities. Officials say the pilot program is part of a broader strategy to reinforce discipline and give prison staff the tools they need to restore order.

The trial, backed by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), will see electric stun guns deployed to a national specialist response unit trained to handle high-risk situations—including riots, hostage incidents, and serious assaults. The decision follows new data revealing more than £20 million has been paid in compensation over five years to both staff and inmates as a result of violence behind bars.

The Prison Officers' Association (POA), the main union representing correctional staff, has welcomed the move. Mark Fairhurst, POA's national chairman, emphasized the scale of the challenge: "Prisons have been overcrowded for decades, which leads 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 Taser—an electroshock weapon designed to temporarily incapacitate a person—is viewed by many frontline officers as a long-overdue addition to the limited arsenal currently available. While batons and pepper spray are standard issue, officers often face inmates armed with improvised weapons ranging from sharpened tin can lids to boiling water attacks.

Former prison officer Claire Lewis, who suffers from severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after being stabbed by an inmate 15 years ago, welcomed the pilot. "Tasers are a great piece of kit, but only in an environment where it's a planned extraction or during an assault," she said. Lewis, who served at HMP Frankland in County Durham, continues to advocate for mandatory stab-proof vests for all officers. "If I'd had one on when I was attacked, I wouldn't have suffered the injury that narrowly missed my spinal cord."

Recent figures from the MoJ show a troubling rise in staff assaults, with 232 claims filed by officers over the last four years for injuries sustained in prisoner attacks. Inmates

themselves filed 334 claims for prisoner-on-prisoner violence during the same period. The prevalence of weapons made from everyday items like drink cans and cutlery continues to endanger lives.

Joan, a former officer who worked in a facility in southeast England, described firsthand the dangers of the job. “They used to use snooker balls in socks. Now it’s full cans of drink. I saw an officer get kettled—hot water thrown over him.”

The Prison Service has also increased full lockdown searches in high-security jails and introduced measures such as anti-drone netting and reinforced windows to prevent smuggled contraband that often fuels violent behavior.

Tom Wheatley, President of the Prison Governors’ Association (PGA), cautiously backed the limited Taser rollout. “If they were issued to all officers on a daily basis, it could carry additional risk,” he said. “We’re concerned that if someone managed to get a Taser off a member of staff, it would become a threat item.”

As the trial progresses, officials will assess whether Tasers could be deployed more broadly. While some civil liberties groups have raised concerns in the past, many within the corrections system argue that safeguarding officers in volatile environments must take precedence. With violence reaching intolerable levels in many facilities, the government’s message is clear: restoring order behind prison walls is no longer optional.