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- Classifieds
- Crossword
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- Employment
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- Our Times
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- Reporters
- Weather

- Public Records
- Obituaries
- Police Logs

- Port. Herald
- News
- Business
- Maine News
- Sports
- Spotlight
- Xscape

- Weeklies
- Dover
- Com. News
- Ex News-Letter
- Hampton Union
- York County
- Coast Star
- York Weekly

- Entertainment
- Concerts
- Datemaker
- Dining
- Exhibits
- Features
- Menu Guide
- Movie Times
- Music
- Nightlife
- Recipes
- Theatre
- TV Times

- Tourism

Police officers use their bean

By Barbara Polletta
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RAYMOND - Though Hollywood may glamorize police faceoffs with "the bad guy" in action-packed gunfights, police say that, in reality, using less lethal force is becoming the wave of the future. The solution: a shotgun that fires beanbags.



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Raymond is one of about 20 departments in the state with this special shotgun, according to Maj. Keith Lohmann, assistant director of N.H. Police Standards and Training.

"These are regular 12-gauge shotguns, but they fire beanbags loaded with lead shot," Lohmann said. "The bag is made of Kevlar, the same material used in bulletproof vests. The lead shot remains in the bag, but the impact is something that the perpetrator can not ignore. It takes him down quickly."

Cpl. Jonathan Kelly, one of three firearm trainers for the Raymond Police Department, says each officer is specially trained in how to target the weapon.

"There are certain areas you must target, specifically the upper thighs, that will take the person down but not deliver a lethal blow. If you hit the wrong area of the body with these things, they can still be lethal," Kelly said. "Each officer goes through training with the weapon in conjunction with their regular shotgun training. They shoot about five rounds of each beanbag type."

Kelly says that there are several types of beanbag rounds that can be used, differing in weight and velocity. This changes how far the beanbag will fire and the intensity of the impact. Raymond is stocked with three different beanbag rounds, each carrying a different weight, as well as a "rubber rocket slug" for long-distance targets of 20-45 yards.

According to Kelly, the weapon they use is a typical Massburg 12-gauge shotgun and the only difference is the stock has been changed to be a bright orange color, to identify the weapon as non-lethal only.

"Officers are strictly prohibited from ever loading regular rounds into the gun," he said. "We need to be certain that if a situation arises the officers know exactly what the gun is firing."

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Raymond Police Department gets its beanbag rounds from a company called ALS Technologies in Bull Shoals, Ark. The rounds run about \$2.50 each, with the most popular version being "The Power Punch," available in 26- to 40-gram bags.

The effective range of the beanbag round varies according to its weight: a 26-gram bag fires about five to 15 yards; a 40-gram bag fires seven to 25 yards.

The amount of clothing the perpetrator is wearing also has an affect on the intensity of the blow.

According to the ALS Technologies' Web site, "The Power Punch" delivers something similar to a martial arts blow. "It is like being hit with the equivalent of a .32-caliber automatic but it's spread over such a larger area that it doesn't penetrate, and it can knock a person out," according to the Web site.

Police Chief David Salois said officers have only used the weapon once in the past three years. On July 17, Epping police requested assistance during a short standoff with an allegedly intoxicated man who was wielding a samurai sword at officers. Raymond police were able to end the situation peacefully by utilizing the beanbag shotgun, taking the man down with one beanbag round.

Kelly says that the less lethal weapon is well worth any added expense associated with buying the rounds and with officer training. He says it potentially saves lives and the emotional costs that a fatal shooting can carry. A price tag can not be placed on that, he said.

"I think resolving a situation peacefully provides a significant savings, when you think of potential lawsuits and the psychological costs of taking a subject's life," Kelly said. "If a subject is fatally shot, you have a enormous emotional cost to his or her family as well as the psychological impact to the officer. It is not a cost any of us want to experience, so these less lethal weapons are a tremendous asset."

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