Objectives

DART-FIRING
STUN GUN

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CURRICULUM 2013
1. Use of Dart-Firing Stun Gun

DFSG521. Summarize basic training or equivalency requirements for dart-firing stun gun use.

In 2006, the Florida legislature created F.S. §943.1717 as a response to inconsistent stun gun use statewide. This legislation governs the training and use of dart-firing stun guns by law enforcement in Florida. Florida statute requires that any law enforcement officer authorized by his or her employing agency to operate a dart-firing stun gun MUST attend either the Commission-approved dart-firing stun gun course during basic recruit training or an equivalent training course provided by the officer’s employing agency. (DFSG521.)

DFSG522. Summarize required annual training for dart-firing stun gun use.

Not every criminal justice agency authorizes its officers to carry dart-firing stun guns. However, if an officer is employed by an agency that does, he or she may be required to go through supplemental agency training before being allowed to operate the weapon. If the officer’s agency allows the use of the dart-firing stun gun and has authorized the officer to carry it, he or she is required by the CJSTC to attend annual re-training of at least one hour on its use. (DFSG522.)

2. Legal Aspects of Dart-Firing Stun Gun Use

DFSG519. Describe statutorily authorized use of a dart-firing stun gun.

As defined in F.S. §943.1717 and §790.01(4)(b), a dart-firing stun gun is categorized as a nonlethal (force level that is not intended to cause death or great bodily harm) weapon. It is used to control a person during an arrest or to control a person in custody when resistance escalates from passive physical resistance to active physical resistance and the person has the apparent ability to physically threaten the officer or others, or the person is preparing or attempting to flee or escape. These statutory guidelines provide the minimum criteria for use of a dart-firing stun gun. The appropriate and necessary use of a dart-firing stun gun will be determined on the basis of the officer’s training and experience and assessment of all pertinent circumstances. (DFSG519.)

3. Authorized Civilian Use
DFSG523. Explain lawful possession and use of a dart-firing stun gun by a civilian.

Stun guns and dart-firing stun guns are available for purchase and legal use by civilians in Florida. According to F.S. §790.01(4) (b), “it is not a violation of this section for a person to carry, for purposes of lawful self-defense in a concealed manner,” a dart-firing stun gun. Further, F.S. §790.053(2) (b) states that a person may openly carry a dart-firing stun gun for purposes of lawful self-defense. (DFSG523.)

4. History of Stun Guns

DFSG525. Provide a brief history of stun guns.

The stun gun was invented in the 1960s by John Cover. He intended to create an electric, nonlethal weapon to control violent criminal behavior. This new weapon was called a Taser®, an acronym for Thomas A. Swift’s Electrical Rifle. Its name references an early 1900s children’s novel by Victor Appleton. Electronic control devices (the words “devices” and “tools” will be used synonymously throughout this chapter) are all generally built using the same principle, which is delivering relatively low power (amperage and wattage) coupled with high voltage to a subject. Compliance is gained either through pain or involuntary muscle contractions causing incapacitation enabling the officer to restrain the subject.

Early in its development, the stun gun itself had to make physical contact with a subject because the electrodes were fixed to the device. This type of stun gun has been manufactured in various sizes and shapes but is usually small and easy to hold. Currently, the two most common types of stun guns are the basic stun gun and the dart-firing stun gun. Additionally, there are several different types of electronic control tools including shields, batons, and restraint devices. The shield is generally used for riot control and in correctional settings. The restraint devices are not seen as much as other delivery systems. The first dart-firing stun gun was developed in 1974 and is the most widely used tool to date for law enforcement officers in Florida. (DFSG525.)

5. How Stun Guns Work

DFSG524. Describe the basic nomenclature and mechanics of a stun gun.

If a person is struck by lightning or sticks a finger in an electrical outlet, the current can maim or even kill, but in smaller doses, electricity is harmless. An amp (ampere) is the measure of electrical current or power. High voltage won’t injure a subject if the current (or amps) is low. For example, a harmless carpet static discharge is equal to 30,000 volts. Low voltage can injure if the current is high enough. Stun guns operate at low average currents.

Electricity follows the path of least resistance. In order for a stun gun to operate, electricity must be able to flow between the probes. The path of least resistance on a dart-firing stun gun is between the
probes. The wider the probes spread on the target, the greater the effectiveness of the weapon. Electricity will not pass to others in contact with the subject unless contact is made directly between or on the probes. An officer should remember that electricity can arc through clothing and even some bullet-resistant materials. Exposing a subject who is standing or submerged in water to a dart-firing stun gun does not cause electrocution or increase the power applied to the subject. It does affect the subject’s nervous system. First, the charge combines with the electrical signals from the subject’s brain, making it very difficult to decipher any messages. The subject has a hard time telling his or her muscles to move and may become confused, unbalanced, and incapacitated. Also, the current may be generated with a pulse frequency that mimics the body’s own electrical signals. In this case, the current will tell the subject’s muscles to do a great deal of work in a short amount of time. Depending on shot placement, the subject’s torso and limbs will either contract or extend. (DFSG524.)

6. 15, 21, LS, & XP25 Compresse

DFSG526. Describe the basic nomenclature and mechanics of a dart-firing stun gun.

The electrodes are fitted with small barbs so that they will grab onto a subject’s clothing. When the electrodes are attached, the current travels down the wires into the subject. The main advantage of this design is that it stuns subjects from a greater distance (typically 15 to 25 feet for patrol and 35 feet for SWAT/Special Operations). The disadvantage is that if an officer misses or only one probe hits, he or she must reload to attempt a second shot. A cycle is the predetermined amount of time (usually five seconds) that a stun device will discharge automatically when activated.
Some TASER® stun guns have a built-in shooter-identification system. When fired, the gun also releases dozens of confetti-sized identification tags that tell investigators which gun was fired and at what location. Some also have a computer system that records the time and date of shots. (DFSG526.)

7. Use as a Drive Stun Device

**DFSG540.** Explain use as a drive stun device.

Drive stun, or touch stun, occurs when the front of the dart-firing stun gun is directly touched (applied) to the body of the resisting subject, and the electrical charge is passed to the subject’s body. In this mode, the dart-firing stun gun works as a conventional stun gun and is a pain-compliance tool only. The drive stun can be used when the suspect is too close to the dart-firing stun gun operator or when a probe application would be hard to make (e.g., a suspect and an officer are fighting, and the dart-firing stun gun operator cannot get a clear shot on the suspect). The drive stun does not incapacitate a subject but may assist an officer in taking a subject into custody.

To use as a drive stun (without firing probes), the officer should remove the live cartridge and apply the weapon directly to a subject. Ideal target areas of the body are large muscle mass areas or areas with high nerve concentration such as the side of the neck, inside of the thigh, or abdomen and leg areas (excluding the chest area if possible). If the first choice of target area is not effective, an officer may consider a different area of application, use of an additional cycle of application, or alternative force option. The drive stun generally does not cause incapacitation. Because of this, officers frequently find themselves in prolonged struggles with violent suspects whom they end up drive stunning several times in several different locations on the body. This often results in multiple discharges, causing scratches on the suspect’s body and numerous signature marks, which are marks left on a subject’s body after a drive stun application.

An effective alternative technique is for an officer to use a drive stun with a live cartridge. For example, the officer fires a dart-firing stun gun, and the probes are discharged into the resisting subject. A drive stun is then applied away from the probes to achieve neuromuscular incapacitation. In addition, if only one probe strikes a subject, the drive stun will act as a second probe by completing the cycle. This tactic also works even if both probes strike the subject. If the probe spread is very minimal due to a close shot or a drive stun with a live cartridge, a drive stun away from the probes will increase the spread and cause incapacitation. Probe hits are almost always more desirable than drive stuns. They are more effective (neuromuscular vs. pain compliance), can be applied from a safe distance, usually require fewer cycles, and cause fewer injuries. (DFSG540.)

8. Maintenance, Care, and Storage

**DFSG527.** Describe the proper maintenance, care, and storage of the dart-firing stun gun.
While most electronic control devices have specific maintenance requirements, there are some considerations that apply to all. An officer should keep the device clean and dry as much as possible. If it gets wet, the officer should make sure it is turned off and put in a clean, dry place until it dries completely. An officer should never test the device while it is still wet. Storage will be based on the manufacturers’ recommendation and agency policy. Prolonged storage in extreme temperatures should be avoided. (DFSG527.)

9. Effects on the Human Body

DFSG528. Explain that a dart-firing stun gun is intended to prevent injury to the subject involved and other persons present.

Although use of a dart-firing stun gun is intended to prevent injury to the subject and other people present, the device itself has a very powerful physical effect (DFSG528.).

DFSG535. Describe the possible effects that a dart-firing stun gun has on the human body.

The human body uses electricity to move its muscles. A dart-firing stun gun essentially overwhelms that electrical system, causing temporary paralysis/incapacitation. A seven to 15-watt system works as a pain compliance tool and does not interfere with a person’s nervous system. A 26-watt system overrides the body’s sensory and motor nervous system but has not been shown to interfere with respiration or heartbeat.

When dart-firing stun gun probes hit a subject, the weapon transmits electric impulses that interfere with the electric impulses used by the human nerve system to communicate with the skeletal muscles, causing physical incapacitation, or electro-muscular disruption (EMD). Therefore, the subject immediately loses control of his or her body and falls to the ground, incapable of any coordinated action. Possible effects of use could include the subject immediately falling to the ground, yelling or screaming, having involuntary muscle contractions, freezing in place with legs locked, feeling dazed for several seconds or minutes, experiencing vertigo or a temporary tingling sensation, experiencing critical stress amnesia, not remembering any pain, or exhibiting minor signature marks from contact.

The subject may not show any physical effects from the contact but may have sustained injuries from a fall as a result of contact with the dart-firing stun gun. These injuries are usually minor in nature. However, there are circumstances where more severe injuries could occur. At this time, there is no evidence that age is a contributing factor in injuries. Also, there is no evidence that electrical energy alone causes significant injury to an unborn fetus or an expectant mother. Manufacturers and independent studies assert that the use of these devices has no residual medical impact on subjects. There is no basis to establish that stun guns pose unacceptable health risks when used appropriately on healthy subjects. The fall that results from use of a dart-firing stun gun, if it occurred from
elevated heights or other hazardous areas, could cause more significant injuries. (DFSG535.)

10. Medical Considerations

DFSG549. Explain medical considerations involving dart-firing stun gun use.

Sudden In-custody Death Syndrome (SDS) is a broad classification for unexplained in-custody deaths, usually occurring 20 minutes to 2 hours after the suspect has been taken into custody. In nearly all cases of unexplained deaths involving in-custody subjects, the victim has exhibited bizarre behavior due to delusional, agitated, or stimulant drug-induced mental states.

SDS is an emerging medical diagnosis for the following well-documented medical maladies: excited delirium and drug-induced psychosis, which is a form of psychosis resulting from drug use. It can cause hallucinations and/or delusions or positional asphyxia, which is death as a result of body position that interferes with the ability to breathe.

Researchers have noted this phenomenon for more than a century. Though there are few diagnostic methods to accurately predict an onset of SDS, there are some consistent indicators which alert a trained professional that a subdued person is more susceptible to the onset of SDS. The most common factors that are relevant to criminal justice officers are the visible signs of distress or indicators that a subject may be suffering from excited delirium.

Some indicators of this condition include unusual or psychotic behavior, disorientation, intense sweating, hot, feverish skin, delirious and/or delusional behavior, extreme paranoia, continuously racing pulse, and/or a history of drug abuse or use.

The quickest and safest way for an officer to handle a subject in this condition is to notify EMS as soon as possible, use a dart-firing stun gun to incapacitate if necessary, and restrain the subject at the earliest possible point using the least restrictive means possible. (DFSG549.)

11. Impaired, Ill, or Pregnant Subjects

DFSG550. Explain how to handle an impaired, ill, injured or pregnant subject.

In as safe and practical a manner as possible, an officer should attempt to discern if a subject is impaired. Although most subjects who are emotionally or mentally disturbed or under the influence of drugs or alcohol usually comply, some do not. Agency policy should be followed in these situations. An officer must be aware that the typical physiological responses to the dart-firing stun gun are not always present in impaired subjects. As in any high risk situation, the officer should be prepared to adapt to the situation and take other tactical action. In general, the best approach to handling subjects suffering from any form of psychosis is to restrain them as quickly as possible to protect them and others from potential injury. Also, an officer should follow agency policy
when encountering an obviously pregnant or ill subject. (DFSG550.)

12. After Care

DFSG551. Explain the after-care considerations of dart-firing stun gun use.

All persons who have been subjected to dart-firing stun gun use should be monitored regularly while in custody, even if they are receiving medical care. In accordance with training and agency policy, an officer should consider removing the probes if all signs of resistance are gone. Probes that have been removed from the skin should be treated as biohazard sharps. If excessive bleeding is observed, medical attention should be sought immediately. Additionally, an officer should clean and bandage any wounds per agency policy. An officer should look for and treat any possible secondary injuries and seek medical attention if the condition requires it. Trained medical professionals should remove all deeply embedded probes or probes that penetrate sensitive tissue areas (i.e., neck, face, groin, female breast, etc.). (DFSG551.)

13. Use of Force Considerations

DFSG520. Explain legal justification of use of a dart-firing stun gun.

Claims that officers used excessive force in the course of an arrest, investigatory stop, or other seizure are analyzed under the Fourth Amendment’s objective reasonableness standard (Graham v. Conner, 490 U.S. 386 1989). Use of force incidents are judged on whether a reasonable person would believe the officers’ actions were justifiable based on the totality of circumstances known to officers at the time the force was used. The officer must consider, without regard to underlying intent or motivation, his or her authority to use force and the totality of the circumstances, much of which officers may have no control over. In these instances the officer must be able to articulate justification verbally for why he or she chose to utilize the DFSG. Florida Statute also requires officers to consider using a DFSG only when a subject is actively, physically resisting. (DFSG520.)

14. Assessing the Situation

DFSG530. Describe how to properly use verbal skills to de-escalate a situation and avoid the use of the dart-firing stun gun when practical.

An officer should first attempt to gain control of a situation by using verbal commands. Many physical encounters can be avoided by this process, often referred to as verbal de-escalation. By disengaging or de-escalating, an officer gives the subject another opportunity to comply with lawful commands and avoid the use of the dart-firing stun gun. If all efforts to verbally de-escalate the situation are exhausted or are not feasible, the use of a dart-firing stun gun may be warranted. (DFSG530.)
DFSG529. Explain why not every subject displaying an active physical resistance will necessitate the use of a dart-firing stun gun.

Not every situation where a subject displays an active physical resistance calls for the application of a dart-firing stun gun. During these encounters, an officer must continually assess whether to engage or disengage and decide on the appropriate force option. Many times, the most prudent approach may be for the officer to fend off the initial assault then disengage and reassess. From this point, the officer can either escalate to a higher force option or de-escalate to a lower force option as the situation dictates (DFSG529.).

15. Lawful Authority

DFSG534. Explain why use of a dart-firing stun gun in a punitive manner is prohibited.

The dart-firing stun gun is not to be used to coerce a subject to give statements or perform an illegal act. Use of a DFSG in a punitive manner without lawful authority may be violating a citizen's civil rights and be subject to the following decision:

U.S. Code Title 42 Chapter 21 Subchapter 1 Section 1983: Civil action for deprivation of rights states that:

"Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable." (DFSG534.)

16. Tactical Considerations

DFSG537. Identify that a dart-firing stun gun is not a substitute for a firearm.

The use of a dart-firing stun gun is not a substitute for the use of a firearm. However, this does not exclude its use in place of a firearm when an officer is afforded the time, reasonable cover, and a backup officer (DFSG537.).

17. Targeting

DFSG532. Describe primary and alternative sites on the body to target with a dart-firing stun gun.

The primary target of a subject’s body should be low center mass or large muscle groups such as the back, buttocks, and legs. The chest area should be avoided when possible. (See Figure 5-5 on the next page.) Alternative target sites might be the back near the shoulders or the back of the legs where, if clothed, the clothing fits tighter and
the probes will conduct electricity to the subject more effectively (DFSG532.)

**DFSG531.** Describe areas to avoid targeting with a dart-firing stun gun.

The dart-firing stun gun may not be as effective when the subject has on loose-fitting or very thick clothing. The intentional targeting of a subject’s head, neck, face, chest, or groin should be avoided when possible because of a higher likelihood of potential for injury to the subject. (DFSG531.)

### 18. Safety Considerations

**DFSG533.** Describe environmental conditions to consider prior to using a dart-firing stun gun.

Officers must observe the subject and be aware at all times of the methods subjects may use to defeat a dart-firing stun gun including where a subject’s hands are. He or she must also be prepared to intervene when necessary with an additional application/cycle or other methods of control.

There are a number of safety factors to consider prior to the use of a dart-firing stun gun. For instance, if a subject is encountered in an elevated position, such as on a ledge or stairwell, the officer should consider that if he or she fires a dart-firing stun gun, the subject may become incapacitated and injure him- or herself upon falling. If a subject is operating a vehicle or machinery and is incapacitated by a dart-firing stun gun, there is a possibility that the subject could turn the vehicle into an uncontrolled, deadly object. If a subject is in or could fall into water when hit with a dart-firing stun gun, the subject could drown. If a flammable chemical spray has been deployed on a subject, the dart-firing stun gun could ignite the subject. An officer should follow his or her agency’s policies and procedures regarding the use of OC sprays and dart-firing stun guns. If a subject is in an environment containing hazardous materials or potentially flammable, volatile, or explosive materials that could be ignited as a result of firing the dart-firing stun gun, the subject could ignite when hit with a dart-firing stun gun. (DFSG533.).

### 19. Utilizing Backup

**DFSG501.** Explain how to properly utilize backup officer(s) to gain compliance and handcuff a subject during use of a dart-firing stun gun.

An officer should try to have at least one backup officer present to handcuff the subject after the officer with the dart-firing stun gun has gained compliance. The primary officer will be operating the dart-firing stun gun and the backup officer(s) will take physical control of the subject. By taking advantage of the time the subject is incapacitated, the backup officer moves in and secures him or her, while the primary officer maintains control through the use of a dart-firing stun gun.
While the cycle (five seconds) is active, the officer may not be able to manipulate the subject’s arms or legs to handcuff them. At this point, the subject is usually no longer trying to resist and wants to comply but has little or no muscular control and may appear to be resisting. It is for the officer’s (and the subject’s) safety that the officer be aware of the subject’s potential uncontrollable overreaction in these situations. (DFSG501).

20. Multiple Exposures

FSG502. Explain the use of multiple exposures to gain compliance.

Some debate exists about the number or cycles of application considered reasonable. Experts in the field agree that there is no definitive number for multiple exposures, but guiding factors under the reasonableness standard will help in the decision-making process. For example, an officer who is left alone several minutes away from the nearest backup and is facing a large subject who is threatening to do serious bodily harm to the officer may decide to use a dart-firing stun gun. At the end of the cycle, the subject still refuses to comply. An officer may continue demanding compliance and deliver another cycle. Several cycles may be necessary until another officer arrives on scene to assist or until the subject stops physically resisting. (DFSG502.)


DFSG503. Summarize the need to stay current on dart-firing stun gun policy issues and trends.

An officer should stay up to date on case law, department policies, and current trends regarding dart-firing stun guns. The manufacturer may provide updates. Also, subjects expecting encounters with law enforcement may be putting objects or shields under their clothing to render the dart-firing stun gun ineffective. They may also “stop, drop, and roll” to pull out darts. If a subject begins to roll, an officer should close the distance, move with the subject, and keep sufficient slack in the wire to maintain electrical contact. Additionally, subjects may wait for the cycle to stop then pull out the darts and may even begin to run away. An officer must
be prepared to close in and utilize a drive stun or transition to another force option to stop the suspect from leaving. (DFSG503.)

22. Documenting Dart-Firing Stun Gun Use

DFSG504. Demonstrate how to properly document use of force reports involving dart-firing stun gun use.

Prompt and accurate reporting of the decision to use a dart-firing stun gun is required, including an explanation of each use and cycle of application. An officer’s employing agency will have specific policy and training on when and how to document this use. (DFSG504.)

END