



Tarpon Police Buying Emergency Gear For High School

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TARPON SPRINGS, Fla. - The Police Department got the City Commission's approval at its Dec. 4 meeting to purchase some new, flashy equipment.

Though it will be comforting to know they have it, the less police have to use it, the happier they'll be.

The department is planning on spending up to \$18,500 on a mobility vehicle, ballistic shields and emergency response systems. The gear primarily would be used in case of an emergency situation at Tarpon Springs High School.

Rather than use taxpayer dollars, the new equipment will be paid for with money from the Police Department forfeiture fund, which comes from confiscated assets, primarily in drug cases.

Each of these new pieces of equipment represents improvements in police resources in the event of a school emergency situation, according to Capt. Jeffrey Young, who wrote up the recommendation for their purchase.

The first of these items is a T3 Personal Mobility Vehicle. The vehicle is similar to the more familiar Segway Personal Transporter, which first appeared in 2001, but is designed specifically for law enforcement.

Equipped with lights and flashers, the T3 has two large back wheels and a smaller third wheel in front, making balance and stability less of an issue than with the two-wheeled Segway.

With the sprawling layout of the high school's campus, the department already has a golf cart for officers to get around. The T3, Young explained, offers several advantages, including speed and maneuverability.

"It gets out there where the golf cart is kind of bulky," Young explained. "The T3 can maneuver through hallways and get through doorways.

"It also has a zero-degree turning radius. You can basically sit right where you're at and spin around in circles."

With a top speed of 25 mph, the T3 can get an officer across campus quicker than on foot and not too winded to deal with the situation at hand.

Along with its superior mobility, the T3 offers superior visibility. As opposed to sitting in a cart, when an officer is standing on a T3 several inches off the ground, it makes it easier to see and be seen in a crowd.

While it is a less tangible asset, Young said, the T3 is also kind of cool looking and less intimidating.

"What better way to have people come up to you than to have a device like this," Young said.

While the T3 will be kept primarily at the high school, Young said, It will also be used for public events throughout the city like parades and festivals.

It is an unfortunate reality that school shootings are part of today's world, and on-campus ballistic shields are nothing new. The Minuteman II the department is acquiring are the latest generation in shield technology.

It will offer a practical means of protection for officers should Tarpon Springs High School ever experience an incident involving deadly weapons, Young said.

"This way they have some type of protection available to them if they ever have to become a first responder to any hostile situation," he said.

Unlike the heavy, solid metal shields of the past, the Minuteman II shield weighs only 15 pounds, is collapsible, and comes with a carrying case for easy storage or transportation.

The department is also buying five of the Emergency Response Systems.

"All of our (School Resource Officers) work with school staff, the principal and their support staffs to follow up emergency plans," Young explained.

Schools have what are known as "go boxes," storage bins in which equipment and information are kept in the event of an emergency situation.

Young said the plan is to have alternative go boxes installed, in which the new kits will be stored.

The main feature of these kits is a series of color-coded, labeled vests to be worn by key school personnel so they can be identified even in a chaotic situation.

"Depending on the emergency, you may have outside resources coming in that aren't from this area," Young said.

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