

PAVA Spray for States of Jersey Prison Officers: Introduction

Background

Maintaining control and order within the States of Jersey Prison Service (SoJPS) exposes officers to situations which carry a risk of physical injury to both themselves and prisoners alike whilst carrying out their duties. SoJPS has a duty of care to its staff and to prisoners. All SoJPS officers are trained in approved control and restraint techniques, and they are an important baseline and safeguard. A safer prison means dealing effectively with a dangerous minority, while increasing safety, perceived safety and improving a rehabilitative culture.

Current tactical options available to Prison Officers

- Officer Presence (assertiveness, de-escalation, use of interpersonal skills)
- Defensive / offensive skills (baton use, handcuffing)
- Control and restraint techniques (wrists and arm locks)

Presently the only current tactical option available to officers is to physically engage with the subject at close quarters. Incidents such as these clearly carry an increased risk of injury to officers and prisoners. There will be instances where it would be safer for a potentially violent situation to be diffused at arm's length.

PAVA in Prisons

- PAVA can help officers manage incidents of serious violence and reduce risk of harm to staff and prisoners.
- PAVA can be used as a form of distance control.
- It has been shown to be an effective control tool and carries no long-term medical risks.
- PAVA is a chemical irritant and, when effective, can reduce the ability of a perpetrator to deliver serious harm and give officers time to manage a situation quickly and safely.

What is PAVA?

PAVA (Pelargonic Acid Vanillylamide) is the synthetic equivalent of capsaicin which is the active ingredient of natural peppers.

- It is dispensed from a hand-held canister in a ballistic jet stream
- It has an effective range of up to five metres (16ft)
- It should not be used at less than one metre (3ft)
- The effects can be instantaneous, delayed or on rare occasions it may not be effective.

The use of PAVA is considered an exceptional measure.

The use of force is always a last resort.

PAVA approved usage

- Personal Safety
- To protect self and others
- Distance control

PAVA should not be used

- Incidents at height
- Planned incidents
- Pain compliance
- Coercive capacity

PAVA - temporarily incapacitates those it is sprayed upon. PAVA - can help to prevent serious harm to staff and prisoners alike, as well as being a tool to persuade prisoners in the act of violence to stop. PAVA has been deployed across 80 Adult Male Prisons in the UK and is seen as a crucial step to help Prison Officers reduce serious harm. The States of Jersey Prison Officers face identical risks.

PAVA has proven in the UK to have a positive impact on staff confidence and perceived safety in dealing with the most exceptional circumstances.

The decision to use the spray is an individual one for which the officer will be accountable.

The use of PAVA spray must be proportionate to the seriousness of the circumstances.

Factual Considerations

At La Moye Prison we house all categories of Prisoner.

A proportion of our population have never worked or lived in Jersey, they've been through the UK Prison system and have violent histories.

At La Moye Prison we currently house individuals convicted of the most serious assaults with offensive weapons (knives).

Staff Demographic

SoJPS is conscious of an aging staff profile and an increased retirement age to 67 which brings added risk to any physical conflict and aggression which is sometimes inevitable in the Prison environment.

Training

The training involved is simple, robust and all frontline SoJPS officers will be able to carry and use PAVA spray. SoJPS Use of Force instructors are qualified to deliver the UK's current approved training package.

Resource Implications

Purchase of PAVA spray and holsters cost less than £2,500- for JCIS. We'd foresee a similar resource implication for the SoJPS.

Authority

Prison (Jersey) Law 1957 (Revised 2006)

"Every prison officer while acting as such shall have all the power, authority, protection, and privileges of a member of the States of Jersey Police.

PAVA is classified as a prohibited weapon under Article 33 (1) b of the Firearms (Jersey) Law 2000 law.

Recommendation:

The Minister is asked to authorise the issue of PAVA spray to SoJPS officers for a trial period of 12 months following which a report will be submitted addressing any issues around its deployment and use.