

LAPD revamps a controversial piece of police gear

by Dan Laidman

LOS ANGELES - As New York City's top cop in the 1990s, William Bratton garnered national attention by turning city maps and paperbound police logs into a pioneering computerized crime-fighting system.

Now Bratton is promoting a high-tech spin on another traditional tool in his current post atop the Los Angeles force. On Friday the chief unveiled a sleeker, souped-up alternative to the flashlights that most officers carry with them at all times.

The traditional long, heavy flashlights have attracted controversy here and in other cities after some high-profile incidents in which they were used as weapons. Bratton touts the new devices for their safety and ease of operation, and said he expects them to spread beyond Los Angeles.

"This is the first time we've made high-tech changes to one of the most vital pieces of equipment an officer carries," he said. "I believe this will be the prototype flashlight for police departments in the United States."

The overhaul dates back to the videotaped 2004 beating of Stanley Miller, a suspected car thief struck 11 times with an LAPD officer's 13-inch aluminum flashlight. Miller won a \$450,000 settlement. The city fired the involved officer and curtailed the use of flashlights as weapons.

The LAPD then undertook a partnership with Torrance-based Pelican Products to design the 10-ounce, 8-inch "7060 LED," which is more powerful than previous flashlights while offering three different modes that can be changed with a body-mounted switch.

"It can be used, if necessary, as an impact device," Bratton said. "But it cannot be used in a way to inflict significant damage."

The union representing rank-and-file officers cautiously welcomed the new lights.

"Overall, the officers and detectives who have tested the flashlight have been impressed," said Corina Lee, a director of the Los Angeles Police Protective League, adding that "we are still concerned that officers may be put at risk by changing the flashlight policy - a change that was made due to political pressure."

Sgt. Jim Schorr of the San Diego Police Department said that officers would appreciate lighter flashlights, although there has not been a local push for new equipment. San Diego officers rarely use their flashlights as weapons, he said, and when it happens it has not generated much controversy.

"I'd rather get hit with a flashlight than these batons that we're issued," he said.

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