

NYPD looking at futuristic weapons technology

6 June 2009, By COLLEEN LONG , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The New York Police Department is looking into adapting futuristic technology that would allow officers' guns to recognize one another in an effort to avoid the type of friendly fire incident that left a cop dead last week.

Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly asked his inner circle to compile a list of department initiatives that would help prevent confrontations between fellow officers. Omar J. Edwards, 25, was killed May 28 as he chased a burglary suspect. Edwards had just left work and was dressed in street clothes and had his service weapon drawn. Three plainclothes detectives came upon the scene. When Edwards turned after Officer Andrew Dunton yelled for him to stop, he was shot, according to the NYPD.

On Friday, Paul Browne, the deputy commissioner for public information at the NYPD, said the department is talking with the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory about the possibility of tailoring technology for the department.

One idea involves the use of radio frequency tags that would allow officers to pinpoint where other cops are in the city, Browne said. Another involves tags that would work gun-to-gun and use an infrared sensor: When a weapon is pulled from an officer's holster it would trigger a signal that would be sent to the gun of a nearby officer. The signal may be seen or heard.

The research is preliminary. A spokesman for the federal lab said some of the ideas floated by the department, like the use of radio frequency tags, may not work.

"We are scheduled to talk with the department next week," said Pacific Northwest National Laboratory spokesman Geoff Harvey. "Up for discussion will be ideas, capabilities and their limitations. ... 'Why won't this work?' will likely be part of the talk."

The suggestions were among a list sent to city leaders. It also included suggestions on training, such as updating the training video for officers, conducting a firearms refresher course and offering training specific to undercover officers.

Also, the department suggested having anti-crime officers visit and introduce themselves to officers. Officer Andrew Dunton, who fired the shots that killed Edwards, was a member of the anti-crime unit along with the two other officers at the scene.

Edwards, who was posthumously promoted to detective, was buried Thursday. The investigation into the incident is continuing. Dunton has been placed on administrative duty.

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