

THE TRUTH ABOUT DEATHS INVOLVING TASERS (aka; “STUN GUNS”): DO TASERS KILL?

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Taser manufacturing company representatives, individuals who use Tasers, diverse law enforcement and medical “experts,” as well as various “advocates” for and against Taser use have long debated about whether or not Tasers have actually killed anyone. But, none of these debates have ever generated anything remotely resembling a “conclusive” result. And, NO investigative reviews of Taser-related deaths have ever been done that generated anything remotely resembling “conclusive” information related to the question, “Do Tasers Kill?”

In my opinion, one of the biggest barriers to being able to conclude whether or not Tasers kill people is this: Those who investigate Taser-related deaths too often fail to consider RESTRAINT ASPHYXIA as a differential (alternative) diagnosis for the cause of death. Thus, they fail to reasonably rule restraint asphyxia OUT before opining about the cause of death.

I don’t believe that a specific “GUIDELINE” or “PROTOCOL” has ever been established for medical examiners and forensic pathologists to follow when investigating Taser-related deaths. However, one can reasonably expect medical examiners (MEs) and forensic pathologists (FPs) to employ the same kinds of death investigation guidelines for Taser-related deaths that they would for any other kind of custody-related death.

Unfortunately, for some unknown reason, when the terms “Taser” or “Stun Gun” (or the ridiculously PC term, “conducted energy device” – aka, “CED”) is mentioned, MEs and FPs seem to totally forget about investigating the possibility of restraint asphyxia having caused the death.

Granted, when a Taser was involved, MEs and FPs may not have been given information about the manner and method of restraint that was used. But, that is no excuse for MEs and FPs failing to REQUIRE that such information be supplied.

After all, these days everyone knows that forceful-prone-restraint can kill someone! Thus, when a Tased person dies during restraint, the restrainers would much prefer that the Taser be investigated. That gives them an “out” for being blamed for the death, because no one has “proven” that Tasers kill people.

Then there also is the stumbling block created by those who continue to be divinely-inspired to blame “Excited Delirium” for Taser-related deaths **and** restraint asphyxia deaths.

BE IT KNOWN:

ANYONE who blames a death on “Excited Delirium” does so without ANY form of scientific or case-study-based support! There has NEVER – **EVER** – been a case of excited delirium reported as having caused someone’s death **ALL BY ITSELF**.

There have been a few cases of excited delirium victims dying due to massive trauma, such as that suffered after they leapt off of a 3-story building, or the like. But, excited delirium wasn't the cause of the death in those cases – was it? No. Those kinds of death were caused by massive trauma.

ALL deaths of excited delirium victims unrelated to trauma have occurred in association with SOME form of restraint. And, the majority of these excited delirium death reports included inadequate (or entirely absent) descriptions of the manner and method of restraint that was used.

Blaming a death solely upon excited delirium is a “smokescreen.”⁽¹⁾ Blaming a death solely upon excited delirium is an attempt to blame the VICTIM for her/his own death – an attempt to shift the blame away from the people who were restraining the victim when the victim died.⁽²⁾

The fact remains that, had any excited delirium victim NOT been restrained in a manner that interfered with her/him being able to HYPERVENTILATE (to breathe deeper and faster than normal), she/he would have SURVIVED the excited delirium. Because, the “cure” for excited delirium is HYPERVENTILATION.⁽³⁾

Until just recently, it has been my stalwart opinion that ALL Taser-related deaths were caused by restraint asphyxia. After all, one would expect a Taser-related death to occur IMMEDIATELY after the employment (or the “last” employment) of the Taser. And, NONE of the Taser-related death case studies ever published has described such an occurrence.⁽⁴⁾

The only reason my opinion has recently “wavered” is this: In a September 2005 Letter to the Editor of the New England Journal of Medicine, two study authors reported the case of an “adolescent” who was “subdued with a Taser stun gun and subsequently collapsed.”⁽⁵⁾ Oh, surprize; the report doesn't describe whether or not the subsequent “collapse” occurred immediately after the Taser stun ... OR, whether it occurred during some form of RESTRAINT that followed the Taser stun!

HOWEVER. The authors also reported that, “Paramedics found the adolescent to be in ventricular fibrillation.” Ventricular fibrillation is NOT the first-encountered cardiac rhythm when restraint asphyxia is the cause of death. (One of the hallmark “clinical” bits of evidence that restraint asphyxia caused a death is the fact that the first-encountered cardiac rhythm is ASYSTOLE – “flat line.”)

But, if a Taser stun was the cause of death, ventricular fibrillation WOULD be the most-likely first-encountered cardiac rhythm.

Unfortunately, I have been unable to contact the authors of this LETTER TO THE EDITOR and determine whether or not the entirety of their case report's information will ever be published.

So, until better information is available, this bare bones case study cannot be used to support the argument that Tasers kill ... nor can it be used to support the argument that Tasers don't kill.

It's simply caused me to SOMEWHAT reserve judgment. (Honestly ... I still am more inclined to believe that the kid died during the restraint that more-likely-than-not FOLLOWED the Taser stun.)

IN SUMMARY!

The “TRUTH” about deaths involving TASERS is this:

No one KNOWS whether or not Tasers kill, because NO ONE has ever adequately researched the Taser-related deaths that have occurred!

Until someone does so, it IS possible that Tasers can kill people.

So, why not stop using them until someone PROVES that they are SAFE?! Why is it that something not proven to be safe is allowed to CONTINUE TO BE USED until someone finally gets around to PROVING that it is DEADLY?

FINAL NOTE

I've just posted several Taser-related articles to a new section of my Restraint Asphyxia Library: "**A COLLECTION OF TASER ARTICLES.**" I don't have the time to "review" each of them. But, in general, I can confidently state that NOT ONE of them represent anything remotely resembling an ADEQUATE research report of Taser-related deaths.

They each have interesting BITS.

But, there isn't a "definitive" report in the lot!

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Restraint Asphyxia Library
<http://www.charlydmiller.com/RA/RAlibrary.html>

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² Stewart J: "Excited Delirium" A Dec. 10, 2003 news article found on the CBS NEWS.com Website: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/12/09/6011/main587569.shtml>
[SEE: <http://www.charlydmiller.com/LIB07/2003DecCBSNEWSstory.pdf>]

³ Miller CD. Restraint asphyxia – silent killer; Parts 1 & 2 (and references)
<http://www.charlydmiller.com/LIB06/2004RASKparts1&2.pdf>

⁴ Anglen R. 167 cases of death following stun-gun use. *The Arizona Republic*; Jan. 5, 2006 01:20 PM. [See: <http://www.charlydmiller.com/LIB07/2006JanAzRepublic167TaserDeaths.pdf>]

⁵ Kim PJ, Franklin WH. Ventricular fibrillation after stun-gun discharge.
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