

Police Shoot Teenager With Taser in USA

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Police shoot teenager with Taser in USA. *Amnesty International*; February 2003.
[<http://web.amnesty.org/wire/February2003/Taser>]
<http://www.charlydmiller.com/LIB08/2003FebAmnestyInternationalTaser.pdf>

Law enforcement officers continue to use electro-shock weapons despite no independent inquiry into their effects

For Chiquita Hammonds, a 15-year-old student in Miramar, Florida, 3 October 2002 started as a normal day. However, on her bus journey to school the driver stopped and flagged down three police officers to complain that students were being unruly.

Chiquita stepped off the bus. According to the police, the teenager became verbally abusive. When she started walking away, one of the officers grabbed the girl by the wrist and attempted to handcuff her. Chiquita allegedly replied by knocking his sunglasses off. She was then wrestled to the ground while the police officer tried to handcuff her. Another officer sprayed the girl in the face with pepper spray, which the police said did not appear to have an effect. At this point a third officer pulled out his M-26 Taser gun and fired it at the girl's back, striking her with a powerful electric shock.



Tom Smith, president of Taser International, demonstrates the pistol-shaped M-26 Advanced Taser at his company's facility in Arizona, USA © AP

At least 74 police departments in the USA - many of them in Florida - have introduced the new and more powerful M-range Taser guns in the past two years. The M-26 Taser gun can cause severe pain, as it uses an 18-26 watt electrical signal to fire 50,000 volts of electricity through the target's clothing to override the central nervous system, causing the target to collapse in a heap. Police like Taser guns because they are easy to carry, usable at a distance and capable of immobilizing a target without, allegedly, causing permanent injury.

However, there has been no thorough, independent and impartial evaluation of the medical effects of electro-shock weapons. At least three people are reported to have died in the USA in the past year after being struck with Tasers. Although most such deaths have been attributed to other factors, medical experts have expressed concern about the health risks associated with electro-shock weapons, as well as their potential for abuse.

Chiquita Hammond's case is just one of a number of situations where police appear to have deployed Taser guns in unjustified circumstances. Officers have been known to use Taser guns on people already in custody. In another incident in Miramar, an officer used a Taser gun on a woman who, while already handcuffed and placed in the back of a patrol car, was kicking the windows and spitting on officers. In Pembroke Pines, Florida, police used a Taser gun on a man who wrestled and shoved officers, while refusing to be fingerprinted.

International standards on the use of force by law enforcement officials require that officers apply only the minimum amount of force necessary to obtain a lawful objective, and that all use of force should be proportionate to the threat posed to avoid unwarranted injury or pain. AI is concerned about the use of electro-shock devices and calls on all law enforcement agencies to suspend the use of all electro-shock weapons, including stun guns, stun shields and Tasers, pending the outcome of a vigorous, independent inquiry into the use and effects of such equipment. Such weapons can inflict severe pain without visible marks and therefore could be open to abuse.

The use of these painful non-lethal weapons in the case of an unarmed child constitutes an excessive and disproportionate use of force contrary to the international standards to which the USA is a party.

A February 2007 search of the Miami Herald Archives yielded three related article excerpts. To see the entirety of these articles, they each must be purchased. However, the excerpt from each tells the basic story.

The Miami Herald - October 25, 2002 - 1B Broward

MIRAMAR POLICE BEGINS INQUIRY INTO STUN GUN USE ON GIRL, 15

The Miramar police department has opened an internal investigation into the events that prompted police to use a Taser stun gun to subdue a 15-year-old girl after a disturbance on a school bus. The department, which originally said there wasn't a need for an investigation of the Oct. 3 incident, had a change of heart late Wednesday after learning the family of Chiquita Hammonds, a sophomore at Miramar High School, had hired an attorney. The three officers under investigation are...

The Miami Herald - November 5, 2002 - 5B Broward

TEEN SHOT BY TASER PLEADS NOT GUILTY

Chiquita Hammonds, the 15-year-old girl pepper-sprayed and stunned with a Taser by Miramar police after she walked off a school bus last month, pleaded not guilty Monday to resisting arrest charges. Hammonds had a brief arraignment hearing in front of Broward Circuit Court Judge Robert Collins in juvenile court. She is charged with one count of felony resisting arrest with violence and two counts of misdemeanor resisting arrest. Her attorney, Levi Williams, says that the charges police...

The Miami Herald - July 2, 2003 - 7B Broward

PROSECUTOR: 3 OFFICERS HANDLED ARREST OF MIRAMAR GIRL CORRECTLY

The Broward state attorney's office has cleared three Miramar police officers of using excessive force on a 15-year-old girl. The officers used pepper spray on Chiquita Hammonds, who is now 16, and shocked her with a Taser as she left the scene of a school bus disturbance last year. Although officers Julie Bermudez, Scott Fitzgerald and Julie Black are now cleared of criminal wrongdoing, Miramar police are still investigating their actions internally to see if they followed...