



news

- 12 News
- azcentral.com
- Contact 12
- Call 12
- School Solutions
- Links
- Lottery
- Video
- Sky 12

SEARCH THE SITE



• Advanced search, tips

[an error occurred while processing this directive]

Coroner: Taser pushed for revision of autopsy

Robert Anglen
 The Arizona Republic
 Aug. 25, 2004 12:00 AM

A South Carolina coroner says stun-gun manufacturer Taser International is pressuring his office to reverse an autopsy that found a Taser contributed to the death of a man last week.

Related link

- [Man dies in Phoenix after 3 Taser shots](#)

Anderson County Deputy Coroner Charlie Boseman said a shock from a Taser was the "last straw" for a man who died Aug. 16 in a struggle with deputies at a detention center.

William Teasley, 31, is one of 68 people to die following a police Taser strike since 1999. His death marks the seventh time a medical examiner has linked the stun gun to a death.

"We still feel that way," Boseman said. "That is not going to change."

Tom Smith, president of Scottsdale's Taser International, denied any attempt to change the autopsy. He said two company representatives called the Coroner's Office to see if they could assist in the investigation.

"They called to provide information," Smith said, adding that there was no attempt to pressure the coroner. "That was not the intent, not the intent at all."

Boseman said his office and the hospital pathologist who conducted the autopsy received calls from Taser asking that the stun gun be excluded from the report.

"They were pretty upset. They didn't like us making that statement in our report," Boseman said. "They just wanted us to (cite) the underlying medical diseases."

Teasley suffered from multiple health problems, including an enlarged heart and spleen, hardened arteries and an obstructed airway.

"He had really bad cardiac disease. He was a drinker. He had a (tracheotomy)," Boseman said. "I think (the Taser) set him off into cardiac arrest."

The Taser stun gun is marketed as an alternative to deadly force and is used by more than 5,000 law enforcement agencies, including every major police department in the Valley.

For years, Taser officials cited autopsy reports as proof that the stun gun has never caused an injury or death. But an *Arizona Republic* investigation found that Taser did not possess those autopsy reports.

The newspaper's review of autopsy reports and interviews with medical examiners has linked the stun gun to six other deaths.

Medical examiners in four cases involving suspects who died in police custody cited Tasers as a cause or a contributing factor in the deaths. In two other cases, Tasers could not be ruled out as a cause of death.

News Headlines

- Valley man charged with making deadly toxin
- West Nile 'hot zone' cools
- Ten valley couples take part in wedding extravaganza
- Understanding wildfires
- Airport checkpoints still too slow
- Prop. 200's effect minimal
- Summer jobs for teens
- Smelly Dog opens up in Phoenix
- Feds claim sting on Iran-Mexico-Arizona smuggling scheme
- Tylenol's maker issues recall over possibly confusing packaging
- Tuna Tartar
- Bus driver probed after man fatally hit
- Baby left at fire station
- Hot market is bailing out cash-starved homeowners
- Teenager talks about surviving bizarre accident

Classified

- autos
- business
- CareerBuilder
- personals
- real estate
- rentals
- services
- stuff

find @ fast

- 12 news video
- contact 12
- weather
- obituaries
- lottery
- jobs at 12
- about 12



Taser has challenged autopsies in these cases, claiming that coroners got it wrong and saying that most medical examiners don't have the experience to examine fatalities following a shock from a stun gun. Taser officials have blamed underlying medical conditions and say the deaths would have occurred with or without the shock from a Taser.

Taser stock price has fallen about \$14 since the deaths were first reported in July. Stock that was trading at \$40 a month ago was trading at \$26.62 on Tuesday.

The Republic, using computer searches, media reports, police reports, autopsy reports and Taser's own records, has identified 68 cases in the United States and Canada of death following a police Taser strike since September 1999.

The paper has requested autopsies for all 68 cases and has so far obtained 23.

Of the 68 cases, records show that nine people were armed when they were shocked with a Taser. Only three cases involved violent assaults or homicides.

Most of the cases involve people who were shocked for refusing to obey police commands or who attempted to fight with officers. Drugs were noted in 31 cases and mental illness in 14.

Police said Teasley, who suffered from severe mental and physical health problems since a car accident last year, was arrested on Aug. 16 for disorderly conduct.

As Teasley was being booked into jail, he became aggressive and violent. Jail staff shocked him with a Taser, which uses a 50,000-volt charge to incapacitate a suspect. Teasley stopped breathing.

Boseman, who has been with the Coroner's Office for 34 years and has worked on hundreds of autopsies, said the cause of Teasley's death was cardiac arrhythmia due to health problems and the Taser shock.

"That was the last straw," he said of the Taser.

Smith acknowledged that Taser has disputed findings in autopsies linking Taser to deaths. But he said Tuesday that Taser has not challenged Teasley's case.

"It's too early. . . . People need to stop jumping to conclusions," Smith said. "I was talking to investigators today, and there is new information that hasn't come out yet. Such as (Teasley's) fight continued over a minute after the Taser was deployed. . . . That's coming from the officer who fired it."

Smith said Taser officials called to answer any questions the coroner had about the stun gun, including the gun's output.

He said Taser has sent representatives to South Carolina to assist in the investigation of Teasley's death, which is being conducted by the State Law Enforcement Division.

"I've got people out there in South Carolina helping in the investigation at the request of the investigating team," Smith said. "There has been no pressure. Or nothing related to it."

Reach the reporter at robert.anglen@arizonarepublic.com or (602) 444-8694.

[an error occurred while processing this directive]

[12 news main](#) | [news](#) | [12 news today](#) | [weather](#) | [sports](#) | [about 12](#) | [community](#) | [what's on 12](#)

[site map](#) | [azcentral.com main](#) | [news](#) | [sports](#) | [money](#) | [entertainment](#) | [style](#)
[travel](#) | [health](#) | [families](#) | [food & home](#) | [shop](#) | [español](#) | [weather](#) | [maps](#)
[classified](#) | [jobs](#) | [cars](#) | [real estate](#) | [apartments](#) | [merchandise](#) | [personals](#)

[customer service](#) | [terms of service](#) | [contact The Republic](#) | [subscribe to The Arizona Republic](#)
[Newspapers In Education](#) | [The Republic in your community](#) | [about The Republic](#) | [about KPNX-TV](#)

Copyright 2004, azcentral.com. All rights reserved.
[USA Today](#) | [Gannett Co. Inc.](#) | [Gannett Foundation](#) | [Real Cities Network](#)