



ACLU Study Finds Lack of Taser Stun Gun Regulation Threatens Lives

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SAN FRANCISCO - Few if any controls are imposed on police using Taser stun guns to subdue suspects, which could explain the rise in Taser-related deaths throughout the region, according to a new study released by the ACLU of Northern California.

In an exhaustive survey of Taser policies and training materials in more than 50 police departments across central and northern California, ACLU-NC Police Practices Policy Director Mark Schlosberg found that while stun-gun-related deaths have risen dramatically, the weapon remains largely unregulated. Tasers work by firing twin metal barbs that emit a 50,000-volt charge into an individual, causing them to collapse from loss of muscular control.

"The lack of regulation of Tasers is very disturbing in light of the increasing number of deaths associated with its use," Schlosberg said. "We fear that in the absence of strong regulations on how police use the weapon, we are likely to see more unnecessary deaths."

Since 1999, at least 148 people in the United States and Canada have died after encounters with police who shocked them with Tasers. More than half of those deaths occurred in the past year, of which 15 took place in northern and central California.

Despite these alarming figures, the Scottsdale-Ariz.-based manufacturer, Taser International, continues to encourage liberal use of the weapon and grossly downplays safety concerns. These misleading promotional tactics are reflected in the training materials, which are almost exclusively relied upon

by police departments. Indeed, the study found that only four of the departments surveyed created their own training materials.

Even more disturbing is the finding that only four departments restrict the number of times an officer may fire a Taser at a suspect. Several of the California victims were Tased repeatedly before they died, including Andrew Washington of Vallejo, who was Tased 17 times in three minutes.

"Certainly, the failure of many in law enforcement to ask tough questions about Tasers is partly to blame," Schlosberg said. "But Taser International is also responsible because its questionable marketing practices and exaggerated safety claims provide the basis for local police policy."

The rising death toll and the company's questionable marketing practices and safety claims have attracted serious government scrutiny. The Securities and Exchange Commission and the Arizona Attorney General have each opened investigations into the company.

The ACLU report, titled "Stun Gun Fallacy: How the Lack of Taser Regulation Endangers Lives," recommends several policy reforms, including legislation that would require Tasers to be used solely as an alternative to deadly force, or, at the very least, regulations aimed at minimizing the risk of death.

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