

Virginia DOC Suspends Use of Ultron Stun Gun

Recently, a newspaper article reported that the Virginia Department of Corrections has suspended the use of the Ultron brand of stun guns after a recent autopsy was completed on a man who died after being hit with an Ultron. This is almost certainly due to pressure from organizations such as Amnesty International that have actively opposed stun guns along with most other less-lethal weapons. In fact, Amnesty International Regional Director Jodi Longo stated, "it is of grave concern that Mr. Angelone (Director of the Virginia Department of Corrections) allowed the use of this weapon to continue for 10 months after it was implicated in the death of an inmate."

However, if you investigate the facts of this case, there is no link by any medical authority between the Ultron stun gun and the in-custody death of Lawrence Frazier, 50, in June of 2000. The state medical examiner's office concluded that Frazier died of natural causes. Certainly, no reason to suspend a valuable tool of corrections officers. More recently, an autopsy of Frazier found that he "died of cardiac arrhythmia due to the stress of being restrained after the use of the Ultron." Amnesty International has attempted to misconstrue this statement to imply the Ultron played a causal role in the death of Mr. Frazier. However, no such causality is implied. Mr. Frazier died of cardiac arrhythmia due to the stress of being restrained (along with other health complications) -- the fact this happened after the use of a less-lethal weapon does not imply and certainly does not prove any causal relationship.

In fact, Mr. Frazier was an insulin dependent diabetic and had been suffering from disorientation and seizures for hours prior to the extended altercation. Sometime after being restrained in a 4 point restraint (face up), he lapsed into a coma and died several days later. Diabetic coma is a well proven phenomenon wherein someone suffering from severe diabetes can fall into a coma. Conversely, there is no mechanism known or postulated by a reasonable medical authority on how a stun gun would cause someone to fall into a coma. I could understand Amnesty's linking the death to the stun gun if the subject had gone into ventricular fibrillation and died during the application of the stun gun. But this did not happen. In fact, it has never happened. Amnesty has chosen to ignore the obvious cause of the death for political reasons and postulate a new cause with no basis in fact or science. This is not responsible behavior for any organization, especially one with the political clout of Amnesty International.

Fortunately, many other human rights organizations have a more rational policy, and can see that less-lethal weapons clearly can reduce injuries and save lives. For example, several leading mental health advocacy groups in Canada have endorsed the use of less-lethal weapons like the ADVANCED TASER because of their ability to help law enforcement and correctional officers do their jobs with lower risk of injury or death to both the officer and the subjects he must deal with.

This is where I think it's really important to set the right expectations of "less-lethal" weapons -- hence the name. Any use of force involves stress. In custody deaths will continue to occur due to the stress involved in physical confrontations and forcible restraint. The use of a less-lethal weapon in the process will not prevent individuals who

are in the process of over-stressing their health from doing so. Over-expectations by management can lead to overreactions and assumptions of causality where none exist. Even if it were the case that a stun gun, or a conducted energy weapon causes a death, the safety must be considered in light of alternatives. Blunt force techniques and traditional force tactics have a known injury and fatality rate which is greater than that of stun guns or conducted energy weapons, even under the most adverse assumptions. We need to set realistic expectations so that we don't overreact when adversity occurs.

While I can understand the Virginia Department of Corrections taking the time to carefully evaluate the results, the undue pressure from Amnesty International, based on inaccuracies and half-truths, is irresponsible and places officers at unnecessary risk by removing valuable tools from their tool kits. I hope the Virginia Department of Corrections will be able to evaluate this incident from a scientific and medical viewpoint and make a rational decision regarding their force options without ill informed pressure from overzealous political concerns.

I have linked two recent newspaper articles for additional information on this incident.

[Virginia Article](#) | [Connecticut Article](#)

I welcome any comments or questions on this situation to Rick@TASER.com and wish both Stun Tech and the Virginia D.O.C. the best in working through this situation.

-Rick Smith

CEO, TASER International

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