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Repository Citation

Wilkes, Donald E. Jr., "Electroshock Injustice Coming to Athens-Clarke County Part 2: More on the "Benefits" of Police Taser" (2015). *Popular Media*. 208.

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Electroshock Injustice Coming to Athens-Clarke County Part 2

More on the "Benefits" of Police Taser

By Donald E. Wilkes, Jr.



Author's Note: I urge readers, before proceeding further, to take a look, if they have not already done so, at my previous Flagpole article, [Taser Time: Electroshock Injustice Coming Soon to Athens-Clarke County](#), which appeared on April 29. In that article I set out various reasons why the Athens-Clarke County Police Department's decision to begin electroshocking the local citizenry with tasers is terribly mistaken, and I also proposed the adoption of rules that would restrict, as well secure transparency of, police use of tasers in the event the Department refuses to reverse its decision.

The misleading and at times even deceptive campaign of the Athens-Clarke County Police Department to persuade us that arming its officers with taser electroshock weapons is a dandy concept, and that a world of good will be done if we give officers the

power to administer painful, dangerous, debilitating electrical shocks on local citizens, continues. The Department is still pretending that taser time in this county will be a happy time. The Department still truly believes that conferring on already heavily armed and elaborately accoutered police officers the additional power to shoot gas-propelled barbed electrodes into our bodies and then watch as we collapse, convulse, and writhe in acute pain, is a nifty idea.

If this were not disturbing enough, many of the arguments being used by the Department as part of their campaign could easily be mistaken for the talking points put out by the company that manufactures tasers. Is the Athens-Clarke County Police Department now a subsidiary of Taser International?

These are the basic claims the ACCPD makes:

Tasers will reduce injuries to police and suspects.

Tasers will save the county money by reducing the number of injury claims for which it will have to pay the costs.

Tasers are nonlethal weapons.

Taser-related deaths of persons electroshocked by police are attributable to improperly trained officers.

If tasers are used correctly, the person electroshocked fully recovers within seconds.

[This casuistically phrased assertion, which ignores the realities of actual police taserings practices and the agonies endured and injuries suffered by victims of police taserings, is so misleadingly worded that it is meaningless. It blithely ignores the repeated instances in which victims electroshocked by police suffer serious, even permanent horrific injuries not just from the taserings but also because they crumple over and strike their head on a roadbed, curb or sidewalk—or even topple from a bridge or embankment or fall out of an upper-floor building window. It also devilishly implies that there is nothing intrinsically dangerous or painful or revolting about electroshocking the victim and that if the electroshocked victim does not quickly and fully recover, this cannot mean that there is anything per se perilous about taserings people, only that the taser must in this particular instance have been used improperly. However, the truth is that there are too many proven instances where tasers were used just as they are supposed to be used and yet nonetheless the victim died, or suffered cardiac arrest, or turned blue and stopped breathing, or became comatose, or otherwise suffered very serious injuries.]

Law enforcement has grown in how tasers should be used correctly.

Having for years researched both fatal and nonfatal police taserings of citizens, and having (with attorney Lauren Farmer) posted a website [Fatal Police Taserings](#), which documents 618 incidents between 2001 and 2013 in which citizens died suddenly, unexpectedly, or shortly after being electroshocked with tasers by American police officers, I know these ACCPD claims are untrue.

But to understand why the ACCPD's pro-tasering claims are inaccurate you don't have to familiarize yourself with the hundreds of tragic incidents of citizens being electroshocked to death by police that I have chronicled on the website. Just keep tabs on current news events. Almost weekly you will come across media accounts from all over the country of police deploying their tasers unreasonably, excessively, or unnecessarily, with the result that a citizen not only receives excruciatingly painful electrical shocks, but dies or suffers serious lasting or lingering injuries.

Just last Friday, May 8, there was an AP news story out of Savannah entitled "Sheriff: 9 Deputies Fired Over Death at Coastal Jail." From it we learn these relevant facts: (1) on the first day of this year a 22-year-old college student under arrest was found dead in restraints in a restraint chair in an isolation cell in the Chatham county jail; (2) the victim had a bipolar disorder, and police who arrested him were given a bottle of his prescription pills when they took him away; (3) last February, a month after the death, the Chatham county sheriff issued a memo reminding his deputies that they were not to use tasers on a detainee whose hands and feet were bound; (4) new policies have now been implemented which require the auditing of taser use and ensure that jail medical staff are informed of the arrival of a prisoner who requires medication; (5) the sheriff "deeply regrets" the student's death; (6) as a result of this incident, the sheriff fired nine deputies; (7) the autopsy report has not been released to the public; (8) none of the deputies has been arrested or charged with crime; and (9) the attorney retained by the dead student's family reports that they still have no answers about what happened to him. Although the story does not say so explicitly, it is obvious that (1) the victim was electroshocked with tasers one or more times while helplessly strapped down in the restraint chair, and (2) a civil rights action will almost certainly be filed in court and, absent a grave miscarriage of justice, Chatham county will end up having to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages.

Two related news stories, published in a Savannah newspaper, provide additional facts: (1) the student died unattended; (2) the sheriff's February memo also advised his deputies that tasering "is never [to be] applied maliciously or as punishment;" and (3) at the time the student was arrested his girlfriend told officers that he needed to go to a hospital, although her request is not mentioned in the preliminary incident report.

Based on my research, I can authoritatively state that the student was at least the 18th person to have been fatally tasered by Georgia police in recent years.

Now ask yourself the following questions about this recent—but certainly not isolated—incident involving the slaying of an immobilized citizen by police using a taser:

Did tasers reduce injuries to suspects?

Have tasers saved Chatham county money by reducing the amount of the injury claims which it will have to pay?

Is it completely accurate to describe tasers as nonlethal weapons?

Are we to believe that the real problem here is that jail deputies were improperly trained in the use of tasers?

Did the student fully recover within seconds?

Does this incident confirm that law enforcement has grown in how tasers should be used correctly?

It is now time for the ACCPD to stop spewing all this cockamamie blather about the blessings that will flow if we give them the power to inflict powerful, painful, dangerous electrical shocks on citizens. It is time for the Department to drop the pretense that its officers, unlike police across the nation, will electroshock us ever so nicely. It is time for the Department to cease insisting that it is going to usher in a Golden Age of Tasing.

I implore the Athens-Clarke County Police Department to please pack up your 145 shiny new electroshock weapons, return them to the sender, and collect the \$200,000 refund. Once you do this, we could have a discussion about how that money might be utilized to help the underprivileged citizens of this county, instead of financing police violence, which is increasingly out of control in the United States of America.

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