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# The Persistence of Fatal Police Taserings 2016

By [Donald E. Wilkes, Jr.](#)



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"Taser International, which sells ECWs [electronic control weapons, the Orwellian euphemism for taser electroshock weapons] to 17,800 of the United States' roughly 18,000 law enforcement agencies and commands an overwhelming monopoly on the market, has said that their weapon does not kill...But the company's position increasingly flies in the face of a growing medical argument to the contrary, as researchers insist that under certain circumstances, however rare, Taser shocks can lead directly to a person's death...These medical professionals argue the lethal potential of Tasers is being underestimated—partly thanks to an 'aggressive' campaign by Taser International to fund research of its own—and that the weapons are

likely responsible for many more deaths than coroners can easily record.”—“Bolts from the Blue,” The Guardian (2015)

“When tasers were first introduced, it was thought that they could be used without causing any harm. Subsequently, in our research and work, we realized that extended use of ECWs could cause injuries and death. That is why we stipulate restrictions on their use.”—Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum (2015)

“Deploying a taser is a serious use of force. The weapon is designed to caus[e]...excruciating pain, and application can burn a subject’s flesh...We consider the stun gun a per se dangerous weapon at common law.”—Estate of Armstrong v. Village of Pinehurst, 810 F.3d 892, 902 (4th Cir. 2016) (case citations and internal quotation marks omitted).

## **The Rise of Fatal Police Taserings**

A fatal police taserings is an incident in which a citizen dies suddenly, unexpectedly, or suspiciously after being electroshocked with a taser by a police officer.

In a Flagpole article published on Feb. 17, 2006, and a follow-up Flagpole article published a month later, I examined an alarming development that has emerged as a result of the ever-increasing use of taser electroshock weapons by American police agencies. Since the turn of the century, there have been hundreds upon hundreds of fatal police taserings. Month after month, year after year, our police kill citizens with tasers. Fatal police taserings, which now occur regularly, are the new normal in police use of deadly force. Taserings is now the number-two cause of death for persons killed by police.

There have been so many fatal police taserings in the United States that those who try to defend police use of taser weapons have abandoned their previous—and preposterous—claim that the weapons are nonlethal and have invented a brand new, weasel-word adjective to describe them. Taser weapons, we are now

assured, are “less-lethal.” In truth, however, a weapon is either lethal or nonlethal; there is no such thing as a weapon that is neither lethal nor nonlethal. Not being nonlethal, therefore, a so-called less-lethal weapon is a type of lethal weapon. In short, a taser is a deadly weapon.

In my two previous Flagpole articles I noted that at an absolute minimum there had been 732 police taserings fatalities in this country since 2001, and that the actual number almost certainly exceeded 800. I further noted that at least 23 of these fatal police taserings had been in Georgia. I also pointed out that in 2015 fatal police taserings occurred in a total of 26 states, with 63 victims (including six in Georgia).

In this Article I bring those two articles up to date by surveying the fatal police taserings that occurred last year, in 2016.

## **Fatal Police Taserings in 2016**

How many Americans were fatally tasered by police in 2016?

Because government crime statistics include hardly any data regarding police violence and none whatsoever on fatal police taserings, this question, as well as other questions relating to lethal taserings by our police, can be answered only by resorting to the trustworthy information diligently compiled by the various private organizations that have taken upon themselves the task of collecting and disseminating data on fatal police taserings. The tasering statistics and information in the present article are therefore derived from these sources.

In 2016, 45 citizens died as a result of police taserings. On average, police killed approximately four Americans per month last year by electroshocking them with tasers.

Fourteen of the 45 victims were electroshocked with a taser more than once. Ten victims were electroshocked twice, and another was electroshocked three times. Another victim was electroshocked either five or eight times, while another received six electroshocks.

The fourteenth victim received an unspecified number of electroshocks. (He was tasered “repeatedly.”)

The 45 fatal police taserings occurred in a total of 21 states: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington.

Eight of these states had multiple fatal police taserings. There were three or more fatal police taserings in five states: California (10), Florida (6), Texas (4), North Carolina (3), and Oklahoma (3). There were two apiece in Arkansas, Michigan, and South Carolina.

Not a single month in 2016 passed without at least two fatal police taserings, with the most in the month of May when there seven. Three times last year—on May 28, Nov. 13, and Dec. 28—there were two fatalities on one day.

At the end of this Article is a list, in chronological order, of the fatal police taserings in 2016. It includes the names and ages of the victims and the state and county or city where the tasing occurred.

### **A Reduction of Fatal Police Taserings in 2017?**

Fatal taserings of citizens by police persist. Last year, as in every year since 2004, dozens of Americans were killed by police deploying tasers. As a result the number of citizens killed by a police tasing since the beginning of the century has climbed to around 850.

In terms of fatal police taserings, 2016 marked an improvement over 2015. Where there were 63 such taserings nationwide in 2015, there were 45 in 2016, and the number of states with a fatal police tasing dropped from 26 to 21. The number of persons lethally tasered by Georgia police fell from six to one.

Will the number of fatal police taserings continue to decline? Everyone should hope so. Designed to stun and incapacitate human beings by administering severe electrical shocks, a taser is a monstrous device. Far too many Americans have suffered jolting, debilitating, unbearably painful electroshocks and then, struggling to breathe as they turn blue, died on account of this dreadful contraption, which is a classic example of perverted science and could have been invented by Dr. Frankenstein.

Addendum: The total number of fatal police taserings of Georgians recently rose from 24 to 25. James Thompson, 44, was fatally tasered in LaGrange by Troup County sheriff's deputies on Jan. 31, 2017.

Donald E. Wilkes, Jr. is a Professor of Law Emeritus at the UGA School of Law, where he taught for 40 years. This is his ninth Flagpole article on police tasering practices. His website [fatalpolicetaserings.wordpress.com](http://fatalpolicetaserings.wordpress.com), prepared with Lauren Farmer, documents 618 lethal taserings by police occurring between 2001 and 2013.

## **A List of the Dead: The 45 Victims of Fatal Police Taserings in 2016**

Sources:

[truthnottasers.blogspot.com](http://truthnottasers.blogspot.com)

[theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database](http://theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database)

[killedbypolice.net/kbp2016.html](http://killedbypolice.net/kbp2016.html)

Jan. 9, Lionel Waters, 35, Milford, DE (tasered 12/20/15)

Jan. 19, Filberto Valencia, 26, Stockton, CA

Feb. 3, Randy Joe Nelson, 49, Athens, AL (died 2/8/16)

Feb. 15, Inocencio Cardenas, Jr., 38, Donna, TX

Feb. 23, Thomas Lane, 37, West Haven, CN

Feb. 24, Alex J. Zoucha, 31, Bellevue, NE

Mar. 3, Alex Thompson, 37, Selma, NC (died 3/8/16)

Mar. 7, Abelino Cordoba-Cuevas, 28, Stockton, CA

Mar. 12, Michael Roll, 52, Bowling Green, KY

Mar. 19, Torrey Robinson, 35, Pasco County, FL

Apr. 6, Christopher Erdman, 39, Bradenton, FL

April 24, Bradford Macomber, 53, Gulfport, MS

May 1, Benston Clinkscales, 26, Anderson, SC

May 10, Nancy Friedrich, 35, Tarrant County, TX

May 11, Cody Jack Franklin, 20, Franklin County, AK

May 16, Scott Macomber, 48, Fall River, MA

May 28, Ollie Brooks Sr., 64, Tulsa, OK

May 28, Ernesto Carman, 41, San Antonio, TX

May 29, Charles Toderro, 30, Greenwood, IN (died 6/12/16))

June 22, Antonio Richardson, 46, Flint, MI

June 30, Roger Bales, 56, Ponca City, OK (died 7/1/16)

July 5, Robert Alcade, 31, Clearwater, FL

July 2, Fermin Vincent Valenzuela, 32, Anaheim, CA (died 7/10/16)

July 13, DeAngelo W. Webb, 35, Oklahoma City, OK

July 17, Patrick O'Rourke, 50, Port Vincent, LA

July 26, Humberto Martinez, 32, Pittsburg, CA

Aug. 1, Manuel De La Cruz, 26, Port Arthur, TX

Aug. 13, Kendrick Brown, 18, Monticello, AK

Sept. 7, Donald C. Degraw, 58, Oldsmar, FL

Sept. 21, Harry Velez, 41, Dairyville, CA (died 9/26/16)

Sept. 27, Dustin Szot, 24, Ionia County, MI

Sept. 30, Reginald Thomas Jr. 36, Pasadena, CA

Oct. 4, Thomas Wayne Binkley, 66, Burbank, CA

Oct. 24, Garrett Schmidt, 33, Modesto, CA (died 10/27/16)

Nov. 2, Ariel Galarza, 49, New York, NY

Nov. 8, Ritchie Lee Harbison, 62, Hendersonville, NC

Nov. 12, Jackie Sanders Weems Jr., 44, Stockbridge, GA (died 11/13/16)

Nov. 13, Michael Alan Sawyer, 31, Ladson, SC

Nov. 16, Bruce Lee Edward Johnson, 39, St. Joseph, MO

Nov. 21, Sarah Palmer, 35, Hoquiam, WA

Nov. 30, Daniel Landeros, 41, Elk Grove, CA



Dec. 7, Christopher Victor Murphy, 41, Sacramento, CA (died 12/8/16)

Dec.15, Marlon Lewis, 37, Badin, NC

Dec. 28, Nathan Hamilton, 39, Tampa, FL

Dec. 28, John Sellinger, 34, Land O' Lakes, FL (died 12/29/16)