

chemical spray, and drug use creates a scenario where serious and permanent injuries can be sustained. Most often people that are killed, directly or indirectly by tasers, go into a coma before death occurs. These comas are caused by a variety of things such as, seizures, cardiac arrhythmia or arrest, respiratory failure, and most notably, "excited delirium".

Excited delirium can best be described as a frenzied state experienced by someone who is under the influence of powerful narcotics, most often a strong stimulant or hallucinogen. The subject is under duress caused by a stressful situation and the electric shock received from a taser. Though "excited delirium" is not an official medical term, it is more and more cited as the cause of death in taser-related fatalities.

The main question here is whether or not law enforcement officials are using the proper discretion when using a taser. Are officers fully aware of the risks that come along with the use of a taser? In a report issued by Taser International Inc., the largest manufacturer and distributor of tasers in the world, the following statement is made concerning the health risks that come along with the use of their product: "Repeated, prolonged, and/or continuous exposure to the Taser electrical discharge may cause strong muscle contractions that may impair breathing and respiration, particularly when the probes are placed across the chest or diaphragm. Users should avoid prolonged, extended, uninterrupted discharges or extensive multiple discharges whenever practicable in order to minimize the potential for over-exertion of the subject or potential impairment of full ability to breathe over a protracted period of time...[people experiencing excited delirium] are at significant and potentially fatal health risks from further prolonged exertion and/or impaired breathing."

Another question that needs to be addressed is the lack of a national standard regarding the use of tasers. Police have a protocol referred to as force continuum; this is how officers determine what level of force is appropriate when handling a suspect or prisoner. Simply put, this means the more violent a suspect is, the more force an officer is permitted to use in order to gain control of the situation. The concern here is whether or not a taser should be higher up on the force continuum, reserving its use for more grave situations. Most police departments actually rank a taser below hard-hand methods in the hierarchy of permissible force.

When asked about the Cleveland Police Department's force continuum and where the taser lies in that hierarchy, Chief Wes Snyder had this to say: "The taser comes into play when there's a non compliance with verbal commands and is used before a chemical spray is employed."

Chief Snyder continued by stating that he felt that "the taser is a step up from the days when officers had to use more brutal tools, such a baton" and that the taser was "designed to be a more humane way of dealing with criminals." When asked about the situation which resulted in Christopher McCargo's current comatose state, Snyder could not comment at this time, but did state that "the taser is a good law enforcement tool when used properly" and that most police departments, including the CPD, do have proper training programs for the use of a taser. Snyder also expressed that he felt there was a lack of any definitive medical research concerning the use of tasers, a statement that has been echoed by many of the taser's critics.

OP/ED

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