



# **Taser Electronic Control Devices and Sudden In-custody Death: Separating Evidence from Conjecture**

*Howard E. Williams*

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Negative sentiment regarding conducted energy weapons is due largely to a lack of understanding about the technology behind such weapons and a misunderstanding of those weapons' physiological effects. Media accounts that speculatively associate sudden in-custody deaths with the use of conducted energy weapons only add to the confusion. **TASER ELECTRONIC CONTROL DEVICES AND SUDDEN IN-CUSTODY DEATH** documents 310 deaths in the United States proximate to the application of TASER electronic control devices from 1983 through 2006. The study examines the phenomenon of sudden death as it relates to electromuscular disruption technology and TASER electronic control devices by constructing 213 cases studies, dating from 1983 through 2005, and analyzing information available from news accounts, police reports, and autopsies. After reviewing the available evidence from this extensive case study, the author concludes that these conducted energy weapons are excluded as the cause of death in 182 of the 212 cases. In only two cases did the evidence tend to confirm the weapon was either a cause of death or a significant contributing factor. While arguing that the TASER electronic control devices are safe less-lethal weapons, the author also cautions that they are not completely effective. He notes that the weapons were not effective in subduing more than 60 percent of violent or aggressive subjects in the 213 case studies, and he documents 131 cases of fatal police shootings and one police fatality following the failure of the weapons. The only way to determine whether the TASER electronic control devices is responsible for deaths is to separate evidence from conjecture and analyze the facts of each case. This book will be an excellent resource for law enforcement professionals, attorneys, investigators, and criminal justice personnel.

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