

Highest number of US executions in 45 years

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Seventy-six executions have taken place in the United States in 1999, the highest yearly total of executions in the US in 45 years. Scheduled executions on the nation's death row, where more than 3,500 people are incarcerated, could bring the total to 100 or more by year's end. Since a Supreme Court ruling cleared the way for the reinstitution of the death penalty in 1976, 576 people have been put to death in the US, including two women.

The state of Texas has executed 25 people so far in 1999, more than any other state. Presidential candidate and Texas Governor George W. Bush has presided over 102 executions since he took office. The state of Virginia has put 11 to death this year, and Missouri has executed 9.

The most recent executions took place in Delaware and North Carolina on September 24. Willie G. Sullivan, 28, was put to death for the 1991 murder of Maurice Dodd. He was the tenth person executed since Delaware resumed capital punishment in 1992. Sullivan's lawyers appealed to the Delaware Board of Pardons for his sentence to be commuted to life without parole on the grounds of his mental retardation. Sullivan had an IQ of 70 and suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome caused by his mother's drinking during pregnancy. His appeal was denied.

Also on September 24, Harvey Lee Green Jr. died by lethal injection in Raleigh, the North Carolina capital. He was the thirteenth person and the first black put to death since the state reinstituted the death penalty in 1977. Green pled guilty to the 1983 shooting deaths of Sheila Bland and Michael Edmondson. Four black state political leaders appealed to Democratic Governor Jim Hunt to delay the execution to allow Green's lawyers access to the state's investigative and prosecutorial files, but Hunt denied the clemency request. Green said before his execution, after apologizing to the victims' families, "I'd like to let the public know the wrong they

are doing now, it compounded the wrong I did years ago. It ain't no justification. Ain't no fairness. That's all I got to say and they know it's right."

In a related development, the Florida Supreme Court ruled last week that the state's exclusive use of the electric chair for executions does not constitute cruel or unusual punishment. They ruled, however, that inmates should be given a choice between electrocution and lethal injection. Use of the chair has been debated in the state since the grisly execution of Allen Lee Davis on July 8, when blood spurted from the condemned man's mouth. The ruling will clear the way for renewed executions in Florida. Although only one inmate has been executed in the state this year, 44 have been executed since the reinstitution of the death penalty, second only in number to Texas and Virginia.



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