

Goodyear worker in Kansas dies after tasing by police

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Friends and co-workers of an employee at a Goodyear Tire & Rubber plant in Topeka, Kansas, were horrified when the man died after being tasered three times by police last Saturday night.

Shawnee County Sheriff's deputies received a medical emergency call at 11:17 p.m. March 29 from the Goodyear plant. Workers and management were concerned for the safety of Walter E. Haake Jr., 59, who had reportedly taken a fall earlier at home and might have sustained a head injury. Haake, who went by the name "Ed," had arrived at the plant for work at 11 a.m.

When the deputies arrived on the scene, they found Haake behind the wheel of a white Jeep in the parking lot. A number of Goodyear employees, as well as company fire and rescue personnel, were also on the scene. American Medical Response (AMR) personnel were also summoned. Eyewitnesses reported that Haake was acting disoriented, and they were worried that he might endanger himself or others if he drove home.

At a press conference Wednesday, Shawnee County Sheriff Dick Barta reported that one of the AMR personnel said Haake had been in need of medical attention and asked the deputies to remove him from the vehicle. Barta said that the deputies tried to communicate with Haake, who "continued to be uncooperative."

At this point, the officers ordered Haake to leave his vehicle, and threatened the use of the Taser if he refused. When he did not comply, one of the deputies used the Taser in "drive stun" mode for two seconds on Haake's left thigh. When he still did not exit the vehicle, a second two-second Taser was delivered, followed by a third for an additional four seconds.

(In the "drive stun" capacity, the Taser is held against a person without firing a cartridge, and is intended to inflict pain and incapacitate the individual.)

Haake was removed from the vehicle. It should be pointed out that the deputies at this point were in

possession of Haake's keys. Goodyear worker Marc Luetje, who was present, commented later to the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, "They had his keys, where was he going to go?"

It took the police about 45 seconds to handcuff Haake, who was by this point lying on the ground. Luetje said that when the officers tried to get him to stand up, he was unresponsive. Medical personnel administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation to Haake, with his hands still cuffed behind his back. After about 20 minutes of CPR, the handcuffs were removed and the emergency personnel began an IV.

Haake was taken to Stormont-Vail Regional Health Center, where he was pronounced dead at 12:37 a.m. The exact cause of death has not been determined, and an autopsy report will not be completed for several weeks.

The Shawnee County Sheriff's office made no comment on the incident for more than three days, asserting that Sheriff Barta had been out of town at the time of the incident and they were awaiting his return. When Barta spoke at a press conference Wednesday afternoon, a number of protesters gathered outside the sheriff's office.

John McNown, a co-worker of Haake, carried signs reading, "Tasers don't kill, bad cops do" and "To protect and serve, not kill." "I still can't believe it," McNown said. "You no longer have the right to refuse medical attention."

Another protester, Robert Havens, described himself as a concerned citizen and held a sign that read, "Welcome to Beautiful Tazepeka." He commented to reporters that he was not in need of medical attention and asked that he not be tasered.

At the press conference, Sheriff Barta stated, "I think our officers have to make a decision. Is this person a threat to themselves or somebody else? Once that decision is made there is a duty to act or not act." The deputies

involved are still on the job, and the sheriff's office is reviewing 25 minutes of audio of the incident.

Clearly, the decision made by the deputies involved was to utilize the Taser, inflicting pain on a visibly distressed individual, despite the fact that Ed Haake was not in possession of his keys, had no weapon and had made no aggressive moves toward the deputies or anyone else present.

The deputies did not call for additional police officers or medical personnel to assess the situation and try to mediate a solution. As Haake's co-worker John McNown commented later, "They should've called a more qualified person to handle that situation."

Outrage and bewilderment were expressed by numerous *Capital-Journal* readers, who commented online on the tragic incident. Typical were the comments of Ladypinkr, who wrote, "It's just gotten to be a sad state of affairs when those who have sworn to 'PROTECT AND SERVE' are the first to make threats of violence. Compassion and humaneness are the keywords here...because nowhere did I read that those feelings ever entered into the minds of those present."

Maizy wrote: "I don't understand what reasonable train of thought would bring one to the conclusion that a guy in clear need of medical attention should be tased? What was their hurry? This is the saddest thing I've read in a long time."

The Shawnee County Sheriff's office began using Tasers in 2004. A report by Amnesty International (AI) in November 2004 stated that more than 7,000 US police agencies out of a total of 18,000 were using Tasers at that time. In a May 2007 study, AI documented more than 245 deaths occurring after the use of Tasers.

The US National Institute of Justice is conducting a study into Taser-related deaths in custody. The United Nations has condemned the use of Tasers, classifying the use of stun guns as a "a form of torture that can kill."

Police and local authorities argue that the Taser is often not the direct cause of death, as many of these deaths occurred in individuals with serious medical conditions or severe drug or alcohol intoxication—a syndrome they refer to as "excited delirium." But if a person in such a compromised state then receives a severe shock, or multiple shocks, is it not more likely that he or she faces the danger of a more acute medical emergency, or even death?

In the UK, the Defence Scientific Advisory Council's subcommittee on the Medical Implications of Less-Lethal Weapons noted, "The possibility that other factors such as

illicit drug intoxication, alcohol abuse, pre-existing heart disease, and cardioactive therapeutic drugs may modify the threshold for generation of cardiac arrhythmias cannot be excluded."

A recent study by a team of scientists and doctors at the Cook County hospital trauma center in Chicago suggests that the use of the Taser can interfere with heart function. The team stunned six pigs with two 40-second Taser discharges across the chest. Every animal was left with heart rhythm problems, and two died of cardiac arrest.

Marketed by manufacturer Taser International as an alternative to the use of lethal force, the stun guns are routinely used as a "pain compliance" method by police. In other words, pain is inflicted in order to force a subject to obey police officers. Use of the Taser is not restricted to arrests, but has been documented in jails and prisons, as well as by campus police on university students.

In the most recent well-publicized case, on September 17, 2007, University of Florida journalism student Andrew Meyer was wrestled to the ground and shot point-blank with a Taser by campus police at a public forum at the university addressed by 2004 Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry.

The Taser assault—videos of which found their way to YouTube and provoked outrage and protests on university campuses—took place after Meyer addressed a number of pointed questions to Kerry about his performance in the 2004 election. When Meyer refused to comply with police officers' demands that he give up the microphone, he was tasered.

A subsequent investigation into the incident by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement concluded that the officers' use of the Taser against Meyer was "well within" Florida standards for police conduct.

Tasers are not considered firearms by the US government, and can be legally carried (either concealed or openly) without a permit in 43 states. Taser International markets them to the general public.

"Citizen" Taser models can be ordered online and come in a variety of colors—standard black, desert camo, forest camo, leopard print and "fashion pink"—at prices ranging from \$299.99 to \$379.99. The latest accessory is a combination Taser holster/MP3 player, priced at \$72.99.



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