

Two Detroit-area men killed in Taser-related incidents

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Two Detroit-area men have died recently after being Tasered for allegedly defying police orders. Fifty-year-old Michael Ford passed away August 25, nearly ten days after being Tasered by Livonia police on August 14. Stanley Jackson, Jr., 31, died on August 20, following a confrontation with officers in the nearby town of Ypsilanti. Both victims were African-American.

The deaths take place as area officials, including Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, have increasingly called for a law-and-order crackdown to deal with high levels of unemployment and social distress.

Local news media reported that on the evening of August 13, Michael Ford, who police claim was intoxicated, approached the cops during a response to a loud-music complaint. The officers told Ford to go back into his apartment after the complainant could not be located. A few hours later the police returned after another loud-music complaint.

According to the initial police account, Ford approached the squad car yelling and wielding a knife in each hand. A police backup was ordered, and when Ford allegedly refused orders to get on the ground, he was Tasered. The police claim that Ford then fell and hit his head.

The officers involved later backtracked on their statement that Ford was holding two knives, with one official now saying that he could not say what type of weapon Ford was holding.

Ford's cousin, Ewayne Harrell, has accused the Livonia police of brutality. Harrell said his cousin had a ruptured spleen, a cracked pelvis and cracks in the front and back of his head. On August 27, the Oakland County Medical Examiner performed an autopsy. The examiner's report concluded that Ford died from "cranial cerebral trauma and complications," consistent

with a fall. The medical examiner found no other injuries.

In Ypsilanti, 35 miles west of Detroit, on August 20 police chased Stanley Jackson, Jr., a father of four, into his mother's home during an alleged drug bust. A neighbor said an undercover officer shouted that he was with the state police, that this was a drug raid, and that he would shoot if necessary.

According to the authorities, Jackson got into a confrontation with the police inside the home. He was then Tasered and arrested. Jackson emerged from the house on a stretcher. He died several hours later at a nearby hospital.

An autopsy was performed on August 28. Results will be available this week, after the conclusion of a toxicology report.

Jackson's mother, Pearlie, told a local newspaper that when she arrived home her son was already at the hospital, and a plainclothes officer from the Livingston and Washtenaw Narcotics Enforcement Team (LAWNET) was in her garage. The officer, a member of the multi-jurisdictional drug force, showed her narcotics but said there was no warrant for her son's arrest or to search her home. She also reported that she and at least two others saw blood spots on the oven and the kitchen floor, contradicting police reports that excessive force was not used during the arrest.

Several days later, in a clear case of police intimidation, the *Ann Arbor News* reported that on August 29, while family members were sitting in Pearlie Jackson's kitchen talking about the victim, several deputies showed up carrying assault rifles, claiming that they were responding to a 911-call of disturbing the peace.

This is not the first time that Detroit-area residents have died in Taser-related incidents at the hands of the

police. In April 2009, a 16-year-old boy died after officers Tasered him. Robert Mitchell fled police after a routine traffic stop, in Warren, Michigan, an industrial suburb adjacent to Detroit. Although Mitchell posed no danger, the police pursued him on foot to an abandoned building in Detroit, where they claim they Tasered him once. Mitchell was pronounced dead shortly afterward.

Under conditions of growing social tensions fueled by high unemployment, law enforcement agencies are taking a “zero tolerance” attitude to any form of opposition to their authority. Both Ford and Jackson were victims of this brutal policy.

It is well established that the Taser is a deadly weapon that kills. Amnesty International reports that between 2001 and 2008, 334 people died in the US after being Tasered. Earlier this month in Canada, the British Columbia Supreme Court handed down a ruling vindicating the findings of a provincial public inquiry, which determined that Tasers can cause serious injury or death. In 2008, a California federal jury found Taser International responsible for the death of 40-year-old Robert C. Heston, in the first trial to establish that the company’s weapon can kill a human being.

Despite these findings, the use of Tasers is increasing. Over 11,000 law enforcement agencies are now deploying or testing Tasers in the US, and over 4,000 police departments provide every patrol officer with one.



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