

# Video emerges of New York police running away, looking on, after setting a man ablaze with a taser, resulting in his death

Jacob Crosse  
12 January 2022

More than three weeks after 29-year-old Jason Jones, of Catskill, New York, succumbed to injuries he suffered while in police custody on October 30, 2021, the New York attorney general's office released horrifying security footage showing the unarmed Jones bursting into flames after a police officer shot him with an electric Taser.

In the first video, a seemingly inebriated Jones can be seen pacing in the police lobby for over 30 minutes, the majority of the time with his shirt and shoes off, as anywhere between one and three Catskill village police officers look on.

In the second video, Jones briefly leaves the lobby room with three police officers, before returning. Within 30 seconds of entering the room, Jones grabs a jug of ethyl alcohol-based hand sanitizer off the floor and begins dousing himself, in full view of all three police officers, rubbing the liquid on his back, face and scalp.

A recent article from the University of Texas at Austin on fire prevention notes that "Ethyl alcohol readily evaporates at room temperature into an ignitable vapor and is therefore classified as a Class 1 Flammable Liquid, which means they have a flash-point of less than 100 degrees Fahrenheit."

Despite Jones rubbing the flammable liquid all over his body, one unidentified cop unsheathes his taser, points it at the cornered and outnumbered Jones and fires, sending him to the ground.

Police Tasers have two modes of operation; the localized "stun gun" mode is less severe and can only be used by pressing the weapon directly against the victim, resulting in a painful shock to the affected area.

The second "Taser" mode requires the actual firing of

the weapon. Using carbon dioxide as a propellant, the device fires a pair of hooked electrodes tethered to insulated wires from a distance of up to 20 feet. Once the electrodes have impacted their target, usually by embedding their hooks into a person's skin, the Taser sends a five-second "pulse" of roughly 50,000 volts. The device will continue to send five-second shock "pulses" through the wires as long as the firer keeps their finger depressed on the trigger.

Approximately 50 seconds into the second video, near the end of the first "pulse," Jones erupts into flames. The officers, thinking of themselves first and foremost, panic and quickly run out of the room and shut the door, leaving the terrified former standout Catskill High School track and basketball athlete to try to put out the flames by himself.

Roughly 14 seconds later, one police officer returns, without a towel or any firefighting equipment, to assist Jones by patting down his body. Once the flames are extinguished, the terrified and distressed Jones, suffering from severe burns all over his body, reaches out to embrace any nearby police officer.

Instead of embracing him, each of the officers backs away in disgust/fear, until one man in civilian clothing, his image blotted out in the released video, comes into the frame and embraces and comforts Jones until paramedics arrive some 20 minutes later.

As Jones's attorney, Kevin Luibrand, said in an interview with CBS News after the footage was released, "Jason was unarmed, in the police station, and not threatening anyone when the police hit him with 50,000 volts of electrical current and he ignited."

"Instead of helping Jason, the police ran out the room, shut the door and let him burn," added Luibrand.

“Jason was clearly having an emotional issue when he was at the police station lobby. He was not harming anyone or threatening anyone.”

In addition to leaving the room after setting him ablaze, in a fact that has been omitted in the press accounts of events, one unidentified cop is observed returning to the room and passively watching Jones writhe in agony while on fire for approximately six seconds, before leaving again without offering any assistance.

After the flames were extinguished, no thanks to the police, Jones was eventually transported to an intensive care unit at Upstate University Hospital in Syracuse where he spent 48 days before being taken off life support and passing on December 15, 2021, according to Luibrand.

As is standard practice in police-involved fatalities, the cops have been exceedingly tight-lipped about the exact circumstances that led to Jones’s death. After the two videos were released by New York Attorney General Letitia James last Friday, Catskill police have refused to issue a statement or comment to the press.

James, who announced that her office was launching an “investigation” into the incident, claimed that releasing the footage now (which the police have been in possession of since at least October 30, 2021) was done “in order to increase transparency and strengthen public trust in these matters.”

Far from increasing “transparency,” the release of the videos only confirms the class character of the US justice system. In the nearly four months since Jones was set alight in the Catskill police lobby, no officers have been charged in his death, much less disciplined.

In the few comments made by Catskill Police Chief Dave Darling regarding the incident, it is clear that the police knew Jones was more of a threat to himself than to the police.

“I think they were afraid he was going to hurt himself, and that’s what started it,” Darling told the *Times Union* in November. “There are still details that we’re trying to develop.”

In an interview with the *New York Times* last month, Joseph Stanzone, the Greene County, New York, district attorney, claimed that officers were responding to a call at a local bar at around 1 a.m. on October 30. Stanzone told the *Times* he was not sure if Jones was involved in whatever prompted the call to the police but

that Jones had “made his way” to the police station while cops were still at the bar.

Despite being marketed as a “less-lethal” alternative, according to research by Reuters, as of 2017, at least 1,000 people have been killed after police shocked them with a Taser or stun gun.

Roughly two weeks before Jones was set ablaze by New York cops with a Taser, on October 13, 2021, 54-year-old Jim Rogers of Pittsburgh was assaulted by multiple Pittsburgh police officers during an alleged bicycle theft incident. In addition to their fists, police brutalized Rogers with a Taser, shocking him eight times.

In a likely preview of the Jones “investigation,” a December internal Pittsburgh police review board found “a series of procedural failures” contributed to Rogers’s death.

Despite this finding, no officers have been fired or arrested. This is despite the fact that Rogers, according to the report, asked for help and medical attention at least 13 times after police assaulted him.

Ignoring his requests for help, Rogers sat alone in the back of a police cruiser for 17 minutes where police body camera audio recorded Rogers telling anyone that would listen, “I need a hospital, I can’t breathe, get a medic, help me.”

Rogers died the following day.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**