

# Taser firms picked up coroner's tab to give lectures

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Taser International and another company closely linked to the manufacturer have paid the way for Ontario's deputy chief coroner to lecture at their conferences on the phenomenon of "excited delirium," a medically unrecognized term that the company often cites as a reason people die after being tasered.

James Cairns, one of the country's most high-profile coroners, who publicly advocates the use of the stun gun, has become one of the top Canadian experts Taser officials turn to for help shoring up public support for their products in times of crisis. Since the death of Robert Dziekanski, a Polish immigrant, at Vancouver International Airport last month, Taser has repeatedly urged journalists to contact Dr. Cairns for his pro-taser views.

Dr. Cairns has recently given seminars at two conferences hosted by Taser International - one in July in Chicago and another last year in Las Vegas.

He has also spoken at a Las Vegas conference for the Institute for the Prevention of In-Custody Deaths, a small private company with ties to Taser. It is headed by John Peters, a communications specialist who often acts as a course instructor for Taser International. Its only other director is Michael Brave, a Taser legal executive.

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## Cairns defends conferences

» Dr. Cairns was slated to deliver a talk yesterday, titled "Excited Delirium Deaths: Public Inquiry Process; ED Training for Ontario Provincial Police Officer and its Impact on the Coroner's Office" at the institute's 2007 conference. He dropped out because he was testifying at an inquiry in Ontario, where he admitted to shielding disgraced pathologist Charles Smith.

In an interview with The Globe and Mail yesterday, Dr. Cairns said he doesn't believe his participation at the conferences is a conflict of interest. He said he attends the conferences on vacation time and paid his own way to attend the first one.

However, he allowed Taser and the institute to pay his hotel and travel expenses for subsequent conferences.

Bonita Porter, Ontario's chief coroner, said it is not uncommon for members of her staff to have expenses paid by conference hosts.

"If he's going to share our experiences and it might improve public safety anywhere, I don't see how that could be considered to be a conflict," she said.

But Dr. Cairns's attendance raises questions about the appearance of bias when probing the issue of whether tasers can kill. While he has not presided over any taser-related inquests, his expert opinion on the role of tasers in certain in-custody deaths has often been solicited. At a 2005 inquest, he testified that an Ontario man, who was tasered three times by police and died less than an hour later in hospital, was not killed by the taser because of the time lapse between the shocks and his death.

The year before, Dr. Cairns urged the Toronto Police Services Board to expand the use of tasers, saying: "I am absolutely convinced tasers will save lives instead of taking lives. And I hope some day, if I am in the position, please taser me before you shoot me."

Dr. Cairns defended his at-

tendance at various Taser conferences. He said he doesn't accept a fee for speaking to avoid any potential conflicts of interest.

"I am not an agent for Taser or anything else. I do not own Taser shares. I wanted there to be no conflict of interest," he said, adding: "I have been invited to many other conferences across the world to talk about things. In those situations, it's always the same."

Taser International did not return phone calls.

According to Mr. Peters's write-up of the 2006 Taser conference in Las Vegas, Dr. Cairns gave a talk in which he "graphically emphasized ... that none of the numerous in-custody death cases which he has been intimately involved with were caused by the deployment of Taser devices."

On the subject of hosting a seminar on excited delirium at the Taser conferences, Dr. Cairns said: "I think the more that we understand about all these issues, the better."