

## Amnesty calls for ban on Taser use after Quebec death

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CanWest News Service

*Friday, October 19, 2007*

MONTREAL -- Law enforcement authorities rejected calls by critics to suspend stun gun use completely until a trail of deaths across the country associated with the weapons since 2001 can be fully explained.

Following Quebec's second Taser-related death in less than a month, law enforcement authorities responded that no such temporary ban is warranted.

"The Taser continues to be a safe and effective use of force for police services in Canada," said Steve Palmer, executive director of the Canadian Police Research Centre in Ottawa, which completed a 67-page report on the weapon's use in August 2005.

Palmer spoke after Amnesty International official John Tackaberry said police across the country should simply stop using Tasers until "completion of a rigorous, independent and comprehensive study" to determine why such police actions sometimes result in death, often in cases involving agitated or drug-intoxicated individuals, and how such deaths could be avoided.

Failing such a blanket suspension, Tackaberry added, Amnesty wants Taser use "strictly limited to situations where the alternative would be use of deadly force" with a conventional police firearm.

According to Palmer, "there's no evidence in the research that links the Taser as a cause of death."

The latest post-Tasering death is that of Quilem Registre of Montreal.

He died early Thursday at a Montreal hospital, after he'd been Tasered by Montreal police Sunday night.

Tests have confirmed that "cocaine was present in his body" when Registre was admitted to hospital soon after the incident, Anne-Marie Lessard of the coroner's office told CanWest News Service Thursday night.

Cocaine use has been associated with a number of deaths following use of a Taser.

Another man, Claudio Castagnetta, 32, died in Quebec City Sept. 20 after police there used a Taser on him Sept. 18, under circumstances that remain under investigation.

Robert Dziekanski, 40, of Pieszyce, Poland, died over the weekend after being Tasered at Vancouver's airport. More than 260 people have died in the U.S. and Canada after being shocked with such weapons since law-enforcement agencies began to adopt them in 2001, Amnesty said.

Quebec Public Security Minister Jacques Dupuis has asked for delivery "as soon as possible" of a report commissioned last April on Taser gun use in the province, said department spokesman Philippe Archambault. The report had originally been scheduled for delivery in December.

Taser guns use two barbed darts to deliver a jolt of up to 50,000 volts.

They are intended to temporarily paralyze someone by causing muscles to contract uncontrollably.

Eight Quebec police forces are equipped with Tasers. Police used Tasers "51 times in Quebec in 2006, with no deaths," Archambault said.

Quebec's coroner "has never attributed a direct cause of death to a Taser gun," Archambault added.

American coroners have ruled out Tasers as a cause of death or a contributory factor more than 24 times over a two-year period, Amnesty said in a 20-page report last May in which it stated that "Tasers are being used too readily by law enforcement officers where less force was necessary."

Montreal police said Registre was suspected of drunk driving when detained after the vehicle he was driving hit several cars, and that he was subdued after he became aggressive.

The SQ took charge of the investigation Tuesday.

A separate SQ probe continues into Castagnetta's death.

"We're not giving any details at the moment," SQ Const. Ann Mathieu said after a Quebec City newspaper quoted witnesses who said Castagnetta had been Tasered three times or more.

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Montreal Gazette

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