

Judge orders stun gun references removed from autopsies

By [Global Research](#)

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AKRON, Ohio – A medical examiner must change her autopsy findings to delete any reference that stun guns contributed to the deaths of three people involved in confrontations with law enforcement officers, a judge ruled.

Friday's decision was a victory for Taser International Inc., which had challenged rulings by Summit County Medical Examiner Lisa Kohler, including a case in which five sheriff's deputies are charged in the death a jail inmate who was restrained by the wrists and ankles and hit with pepper spray and a stun gun.

Kohler ruled that the 2006 death of Mark McCullaugh Jr., 28, was a homicide and that he died from asphyxiation due to the "combined effects of chemical, mechanical and electrical restraint."

Visiting Judge Ted Schneiderman said in his ruling that there was no expert evidence to indicate that Taser devices impaired McCullaugh's respiration. "More likely, the death was due to a fatal cardiac arrhythmia brought on by severe heart disease," the judge wrote.

Schneiderman ordered Kohler to rule McCullaugh's death undetermined and to delete any references to homicide.

The judge also said references to stun guns contributing to the deaths of two other men must be deleted from autopsy findings. Dennis Hyde, 30, died in 2005 after a confrontation with Akron police, and Richard Holcomb, 18, died the same year after being hit with a stun by a police officer in suburban Springfield Township.

It was unclear what affect Schneiderman's ruling may have on the upcoming criminal trial of the five sheriff's deputies. One of them, Deputy Stephen Krendick, is charged with murder. Other deputies face charges of reckless homicide or felonious assault. All have pleaded not guilty.

Krendick's trial is scheduled to begin June 16. A spokesman for the Cuyahoga County prosecutor's office, which is handling the case, said its lawyers are prepared to go forward.

Steve Tuttle, vice president of communications for Taser International, said the Scottsdale, Ariz.-based company is pleased with Schneiderman's ruling.

"Taser International believed from the beginning that these determinations of cause of death must be supported by facts, medical research and scientific evidence," Tuttle said.

John Manley, a Summit County prosecutor who represented Kohler, said the judge's order went too far. The county is considering an appeal, he said.

"Taser is quite a force to be reckoned with and does everything to protect their golden egg, which is the Model X26," Manley said.

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