

MASSACHUSETTS MONEY AND POLITICS PROJECT

A PROGRAM OF THE COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION PROJECT

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'Taser' Stun Guns - Money and Politics Issue Brief **March 2005**

The International Association of Chiefs of Police has urged police departments around the country to review the use of Taser stun guns because their use has been linked to at least 80 deaths nationwide¹. A study by Amnesty International found that roughly half of the victims have been African American.

In early February 2005, the Chicago Police Department stopped distributing 100 additional Tasers to officers until an investigation into the death of a 54-year-old man who was stunned with a Taser and later died is complete. In January, the Securities and Exchange Commission began an investigation of the weapon's safety.

Despite these concerns, Raynam, Massachusetts recently approved their use. According to the Arizona based Taser International, roughly 6,000 police departments nationwide use their weapons and 200 of those departments supply Tasers to every police officer.

Taser International has sold 130,000 stun guns to 7,000 of the 16,000 police departments nationwide. The weapon delivers 50,000 volts through a two-pronged device that temporarily paralyzes the victim. Taser has several models; the mid level shocker costs about \$600.

Taser spent over \$30,000 lobbying the Massachusetts legislature last year; *the company's first lobbying effort in Massachusetts*. The firm O'Neill and Associates lobbies on behalf of Taser. O'Neill and Associates other clients include: Pepsi Co., Sovereign Bank, Oracle Corporation, and 'Big Dig' contractor Bechtel.

On October 18 2004, Taser executive and Scottsdale Arizona resident Stephen Tuttle made a \$500 contribution to then Public Safety Committee Chair Rep. Timothy Toomey. At the national level, Taser International president Thomas Smith made a \$25,000 contribution to the National Republican Congressional Committee in April 2004.²

¹ More than 80 deaths have been reported since 1999 after victims were shocked with stun guns, according to reviews by *The Arizona Republic* and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

² Federal contribution data courtesy of the Center for Responsive Politics.

The MA Money and Politics Project is a project of the Commonwealth Education Project. MA Money and Politics conducts research and analysis of state wide and state legislative campaign finance trends. For more information, visit www.comcoal.org or contact Galen Nelson at 617.422.0118 or gnelson@comcoal.org.