



# Save Clarence Hill

Stop the execution of Clarence Hill

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### [Autopsy reports expose cruelty of lethal injection](#)

 by [janneke](#) on Tue Feb 21, 2006 3:29 pm

February 10, 2006

Autopsy reports expose cruelty of lethal injection

<http://www.news-journalonline.com/NewsJ ... 021006.htm>

It's the stuff of nightmares, and the very definition of cruel and unusual punishment: A prisoner remaining aware, but paralyzed and unable to speak, while a deadly, caustic drug flows through his veins.

This could be the reality of execution in the United States. Lethal injections, the preferred method of execution in every state but Nevada, use three drugs: sodium thiopental, a surgical anesthetic, followed

by the paralytic drug pancuronium bromide, and finally potassium chloride, which stops the heart and causes death.

A medical journal's review of autopsy reports in 49 executions by lethal injection in Texas and Virginia showed that 43 had critically low levels of anesthetic in their bloodstreams, and 21 had so little that they were likely conscious throughout the painful process of stopping their heart.

This is unwelcome news to death-penalty supporters, but no surprise to those familiar with the history of lethal injection. It's a procedure that's frequently botched. The American Medical Association and other professional medical groups condemn capital punishment, so doctors and nurses usually refuse to participate in executions. That means executions are often performed by under-trained medical technicians, who often have a hard time finding a vein. Even in states where trained medical personnel are involved in executions, it's often to insert intravenous lines into veins scarred by drug abuse.

If the drugs aren't administered properly, the line used to feed them into the prisoner's body can clog, delaying the execution. Even when everything goes technically right, things go wrong: When the state of California executed 76-year-old Clarence Ray Allen last month, the first dose of drugs wasn't enough to stop his heart.

Florida's lethal injection process follows that of other states. The only difference is that Florida inmates are offered Valium, a mild tranquilizer, before the execution starts. It's hard to imagine a pill powerful enough to calm the terror and agony of feeling veins burning as if acid had been injected into them.

This isn't the first time an execution method fell short. Two gory electrocutions in Florida speeded the demise of the electric chair as an execution method (only Nevada now uses it.) Hanging too often resulted in prolonged deaths, the firing squad is on its way out in the last two states that use it and the gas chamber, perhaps the cruelest of methods used in this country, probably won't be used again in the United States.

Now lethal injection is under attack. Two Florida executions are now on hold while the U.S. Supreme Court decides whether the inmates will be able to challenge lethal injection as cruel and unusual. Clarence Hill, who murdered a police officer in 1982, was strapped to a gurney with IV tubes in his arms when the Supreme Court issued a stay. Arthur Rutherford, who killed a Milton woman in 1985, was scheduled to die a few days later.

State officials argue that Hill and Rutherford showed no mercy to their victims, and deserve none from the state.

Their vision is skewed. The state should not fight for the right to sink to the same level as murderers.

The grim reality of the death penalty is that it's hard to end the lives of healthy human beings without torturing them in some way. Even if the death penalty had been proven to be effective in stopping crime (it hasn't) or were fairly administered (it isn't), it is inescapably cruel, reprehensible to any just society. Rather than searching for acceptable methods, Florida leaders should declare their intent to end the death penalty in this state.

[janneke](#)

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