



Execution by lethal injection

A quarter century of state poisoning



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Amnesty International opposes the death penalty and all methods of execution. It is committed to ending executions by lethal injection or by any other method. The problem lies not with the *method* of execution but with the punishment itself.

However, execution by lethal injection raises particular problems, including the misuse of medical skills and the fact that it is seen as painless and “humane” despite having the potential to cause physical pain and mental suffering. States seek the involvement of health personnel in contravention of virtually all codes of health professional ethics which consider the death penalty. The increased pressure on medical professionals to participate in executions raises serious ethical and human rights issues.

More than 900 prisoners have been executed in the USA since the method was first used in 1982. It has all but replaced the alternative methods – electric chair, hanging, gassing and firing squad. Over the subsequent 20 years lethal injection was adopted by the governments of China, Guatemala, the Philippines and Thailand (and is provided for by law, but not used, in Taiwan). Other countries are considering its introduction.

Execution by lethal injection – A quarter century of state poisoning reviews developments with respect to lethal injection executions over the past decade and notes the increasing disquiet about the method felt by those concerned with justice and human rights.

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Cover image: Health professionals assist at the execution of Manuel Martínez Coronado, the first by lethal injection in Guatemala, February 1998. © Jorge Uzon

Back cover images: Manuel Martínez Coronado awaiting execution by lethal injection. © Jorge Uzon



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