



PRESS RELEASE



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Community demands release of videotape of in-custody death

Representatives of a leading aboriginal and civil society group, along with a forensic pathologist and a journalist gathered yesterday to demand the release of security footage taken in an RCMP lockup that shows the Taser-related death of Clayton Alvin Willie, an aboriginal man.

Willie was arrested in 2003 for creating a public disturbance in Prince George, British Columbia, and died that same day following his interaction with police with a head injury and multiple broken ribs. RCMP officials acknowledge he was repeatedly Tasered while hog tied at the Prince George RCMP detachment.

Security camera footage from the jail of the incident was edited by the RCMP, and the RCMP retains a copy of the edited footage. Representatives of the UBCIC and BCCLA, along with Dr. John Butt and Leonard Cler-Cunningham, the independent journalist who uncovered the existence of the video, have viewed the edited footage.

“Even the edited footage shows Mr. Willie hog tied and being dragged around the Prince George RCMP detachment and being Tasered while lying helpless on his stomach,” said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “If you treated any animal the way Mr. Willie was treated, there is little doubt that you would be facing criminal cruelty charges. Astonishingly, the officers involved here are still on active duty.”

The original footage may be lost, or may be in the custody of the RCMP or Coroner’s Office. Both offices have refused to release the edited or the full video to the public citing privacy concerns, despite receiving a notarized release from Clayton Willie’s family.

“This video must get out to the public, in the same way that the Dziekanski video was released, so that there can be some justice for Clayton Alvin Willie,” said David Eby, Executive Director of the BCCLA.

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Backgrounder



Who was involved in this incident?

In January, 2009, two of the RCMP officers involved in the Willie case were found by Provincial Court Judge Micheal Brecknell to have taken deliberate steps to ensure the loss of Prince George detachment videotape of another Taser abuse allegation. RCMP will not confirm whether those officers are still on active duty, but media reports indicate that investigative action was taken by the RCMP into that finding.

What is the content of the video?

- There are no date or time codes in the edited videotape.
- The video shows an RCMP SUV arriving at the Prince George Detachment garage.
- The video cuts away before RCMP say Clayton is pulled, hog tied, from the back seat of the SUV and allowed to drop, full weight, on his chest and possibly on his face.
- Clayton is then dragged down a hallway, with his hands bound behind his back and tethered to his feet, into an elevator. His head hits the doorway on his way into the elevator and he does not register any response.
- In the elevator, an RCMP officer can be seen targeting his Taser on Clayton's back and kneeling down and applying the device to Clayton's back.
- Clayton is then dragged out of the elevator into the booking area of the detachment. A number of RCMP officers, including senior officers are seen observing while the two male officers handling Mr. Willie Taser him at least twice more.
- Mr. Willie appears to lose consciousness, and an ambulance attends the scene.
- The RCMP advise that ambulance attendants ask the officers present to loosen Mr. Willie's handcuffs because his hands are "black". The video shows officers loosening his handcuffs.
- Still hog tied, Mr. Willie is loaded onto the stretcher, wrapped in blankets, and taken to the local hospital.
- He has a massive heart attack en route to the hospital and dies, which is not shown on the video.

What is the video?

The video reviewed by the representatives at the press conference is an edited compilation of the surveillance videotape taken at the RCMP Prince George detachment. It, and possibly the full, unedited footage, is in the possession of the RCMP and the B.C. Coroners Service.

What were the consequences of these actions?

The RCMP investigation found that all interactions with Mr. Willie were "routine" and there was no discipline as a result.



Participants



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC). Grand Chief Phillip has been married for twenty-two years to his wife Joan. They have four grown sons, two daughters, four granddaughters and four grandsons. Grand Chief Phillip was elected to a fourth consecutive term as Chief of the Penticton Indian Band and is Chair of the Okanagan Nation Alliance.

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David Eby, Executive Director of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) David Eby is the 33-year-old Executive Director of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association. An adjunct professor of law at the University of British Columbia, David is also the President of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and a research associate with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

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Dr. John C. Butt is a highly-qualified specialist in forensic medicine and pathology, having served as Chief Medical Examiner for the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Nova Scotia, and also as president of the National Association of Medical Examiners in the United States.

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Leonard Cler-Cunningham is a writer. He lives with his daughter Hailey in Vancouver BC. His book and documentary on Aboriginal deaths in custody is due out next year.

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