

**WIDESPREAD CALLS FOR THE BANNING OF CS SPRAY FOLLOWING
INQUEST INTO DEATH IN METROPOLITAN POLICE CUSTODY
7th September 2000**

West London Coroner Alison Thompson expressed her intention to write to the Home Secretary and Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens to add her voice to the growing concerns over police use of CS Spray to restrain suspects. Her comments, which mirror the concerns held by INQUEST over the use of CS since its introduction in 1996, were made following the inquest into the death in custody of 26-year-old fitness trainer Oliver Scott. The jury at the inquest, which concluded on Tuesday 5th September at West London Coroner's Court, returned a verdict of Misadventure.

Mr Scott was arrested on December 18th 1999 by police officers based at Hammersmith Police Station after they received a call regarding a man 'acting strangely' near Shepherd's Bush Green. In the process of arresting Mr Scott a number of CS canisters were discharged and Mr Scott received numerous blows from police batons which resulted in various injuries. Following his arrest he was taken to Hammersmith police station, his clothes soaked in chemicals, where officers continued to restrain him until an ambulance arrived. He was taken to Charing Cross Hospital where he was later certified dead. The cause of death established at the inquest was cocaine toxicity.

Mr Scott had ingested 10 grams of cocaine before his arrest during which he was sprayed with three cans of CS. Pathologist Nat Carey gave evidence to the inquest, suggesting that the breathing difficulties he experienced in the police cell could well have been exacerbated by the CS build up in Mr Scott's airway. Even though according to evidence given by the police officers restraining him in the cell his clothes had been replaced with a paper suit, chemical residue on his skin affected both him and the officers to varying degrees. Nat Carey also noted that this was possibly the most excessive use of CS he had come across in his experience as one of the leading pathologists in the country. He also indicated that the additional use of the spray beyond the first occasion would be largely ineffective in most cases, and may well have contributed to the breathing problems of Mr. Scott and the officers in the restricted space of a police cell.

The inquest was the first opportunity that Oliver's wife Callie had to find out about the full circumstances about his death and the conduct of those responsible for his arrest and detention. Her concerns, and those of INQUEST, regarding the excessive use of CS Spray and the medical care he received at the police station following its use were also shared by the Metropolitan Police who recognised that the effects of the CS on both the person being detained and the officers using the spray could do more harm than expected.

INQUEST has serious concerns about the number of restraint-related deaths in Metropolitan Police custody and the increasing use of CS spray.

Deborah Coles, Co-director of INQUEST said:

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“Since the introduction of CS we have seen a disturbing number of deaths and serious injuries. Research undertaken by the Home Office before the issuing of what is a potentially lethal chemical weapon to police officers was minimal. Every inquest into a death where CS spray has been used has seen serious concerns being raised by jurors, medical experts, coroners and indeed the police themselves. We would call for CS to be banned. While it continues to be used we are going to have more deaths and more cases of serious injury.”

Other recommendations on the use of restraint and CS spray have been made following inquests and by the Police Complaints Authority, prior to Oliver Scott’s death, but it remains to be seen if lessons will actually be learned.