

Terry Lenamon on the Death Penalty

Sidebar with a Board Certified Expert Criminal Trial Attorney



Terence M. Lenamon is a Florida Bar certified expert in the area of criminal trial law. With over 17 years experience he has built a reputation as one of Florida's most respected criminal defense lawyers. His defense has been sought by many high-profile clients and has led him through 20 first-degree murder trials and eight death penalty cases. That experience has brought him national recognition as a go-to commentator on death penalty issues. He is the force behind both deathpenaltyblog.com and Florida Capital Resource Center (floridacapitalresourcecenter.org), and can be reached at terry@lenamonlaw.com.

Tennessee Is Considering Using Pentobarbital in its Executions, the Drug Used to Put Down Pets

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Seems **Tennessee can't find a supplier for its lethal injection executions** using a three drug cocktail that includes sodium thiopental (guess they haven't called Besse Medical), so **pentobarbital** is apparently being **considered as a substitute**.

According to its **state website**, Tennessee has a long execution history, with hanging and the electric chair as two prior methods -- electrocution still being a viable alternative that has been used as late as 2007:

Until 1913, all individuals convicted of a capital offense were hanged. There are no official records of the number or names of those executed. From 1913 to 1915, there was no capital punishment in Tennessee. C. Rye was Governor during the first execution by electrocution. From 1916 until 1960, 125 persons were executed by electrocution in Tennessee. In 2000, lethal injection replaced electrocution as the primary method of execution. In September, 2007 the first electrocution in 47 years was carried out.

Oklahoma has decided upon pentobarbital.

Of course, there's already a precedent set for using pentobarbital that Tennessee could follow. Oklahoma already treated **John David Duty, Billy Don Alverson, and Jeffrey David Matthews** just like veterinarians treat dogs and cats all over the country, when they used pentobarbital in their executions. And apparently, Oklahoma is fine with this and plans to continue using pentobarbital, [according to its website description of its execution methods](#).

Meanwhile, Tennessee isn't having such an easy time here.

According to an article written by Brian Haas in [the Tennessean](#) earlier this month, entitled, "[Tennessee has few options for execution drugs; Imports, sedative used to put down animals face likely challenges](#)," Tennessee has 86 men on Death Row -- but not nearly enough sodium thiopental to handle the demand. However, Tennessee isn't having the smooth transition to vet-drugs that Oklahoma did.

Tennessee wouldn't need to enact new law before changing over to the alternative drug, it's an administrative decision apparently that can be made rather quickly and without lengthy review in advance. Still, [the state officials aren't rushing to adopt Oklahoma's example](#) (like Ohio appears to be doing).

Maybe Tennessee will [consider the warnings of anesthesiologists and others in the medical community](#) that are warning against assuming that pentobarbital will act on humans like it acts on dogs.

Returning to electrocution vs. using pentobarbital? Are these really the only options, Tennessee?