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Governor delays execution after suitable vein can't be found

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LUCASVILLE -- After his lethal injection was delayed for hours because of his own attorney's appeal request, an Ohio inmate condemned for the 1984 rape and slaying of a teen girl tried to help hasten his own death as his executioners had trouble finding usable veins.

Romell Broom, 35, turned onto his side, slid rubber tubing up his left arm and moved the arm up and down while flexing and opening his fingers. The execution team accessed a vein, but it collapsed when technicians tried to insert saline fluid, bringing Broom to tears.

Prisons director Terry Collins decided after a two-hour effort using Brooms arms and legs that the team had had enough. He contacted Gov. Ted Strickand, who issued the state's first last-minute reprieve since Ohio resumed executions in 1999.

The team began working on Broom, in a holding cell 17 steps from the execution chamber, at about 2 p.m., four hours after his execution's originally scheduled time due to a final federal appeals request.

Broom began helping about an hour into the process. When his help made no difference, he turned onto his back and covered his face with both hands. His torso heaved up and down and his feet shook. He wiped his eyes and was handed a roll of toilet paper, which he used to wipe his brow.

When the technicians tried to use his legs, he grimaced, and a member of the execution team patted him on the back.

Broom, who did not have any witnesses present, requested that one of his attorneys, Adele Shank, come to the witness area. She asked to speak with Broom but was told that once the process started, it's protocol that attorneys can't have contact with their client.

"I want to know what Romell wants," Shank told a prison official, who told her that he was being cooperative.

"He's always cooperative," responded Shank. "I want to know what he wants me to do."

Meanwhile, another lawyer for Broom, Tim Sweeney, wrote Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas J. Moyer asking him to end the procedure.

"Any further attempts today to carry out the execution of Mr. Broom would be cruel and unusual punishment in violation of ... the U.S. Constitution," he wrote. "They would also violate Ohio's statutory requirement that a lethal injection execution is to be quick and painless."

The scene Tuesday was reminiscent of the problems that delayed executions in 2006 and 2007 and led to changes in Ohio's lethal injection process.

In 2006, the execution of Joseph Clark was delayed for more than an hour after the team failed to properly attach an IV.

Since Clark, the state's execution rules have allowed team members to take as much time as they need to find the best vein for the IVs that carry three chemicals.

The state also had difficulty finding the veins of inmate Christopher Newton, whose May 2007 execution was delayed nearly two hours. In that case, the state said the delay was caused by team members taking their time.

Collins said the difficulty in the process "absolutely, positively" does not shake his faith in the state's lethal injection procedure. A medical evaluation on Monday had determined that veins in Broom's right arm appeared accessible, while those in his left arm were not as visible.

He said the team would try to figure out, before Broom's next scheduled execution, how to resolve the problem with finding suitable veins.

Collins said he thanked Broom after the reprieve was issued for the respectful way he dealt with the execution team and the demeanor he showed through the difficulties.

Ohio has executed 32 men since Wilford Berry in 1999, an execution slightly delayed also because of problems finding a vein.
