

Nebraska gets drug it needs to do lethal injections

By JoANNE YOUNG / [Lincoln Journal Star](#) JournalStar.com | Posted: Friday, January 21, 2011



Journalists photograph the execution chamber at the Nebraska State Penitentiary on July 7, 2010 as officials offered a tour of the execution facility in the wake of its conversion to accommodate lethal injection. (LJS file)

The Nebraska Department of Corrections said Friday it has received a shipment of the last of three drugs needed to carry out death penalty executions.

The department got the supply of sodium thiopental, used to cause unconsciousness, on Jan. 7 from a pharmaceuticals company in India. A sample of the drug was tested by an independent U.S. laboratory and confirmed to be the correct drug, the department said.

Corrections Director Robert Houston said that, with the drug, the department is ready to carry out an execution if called upon to do so.

The drug, which is said to cause unconsciousness in less than a minute, has been difficult to obtain because of a shortage since at least last spring. The difficulty in obtaining the drug has disrupted executions around the country.

The Nebraska lethal injection protocol uses a 3-gram dose of sodium thiopental followed by a consciousness check one minute after administering it. If the inmate is not unconscious, another 3 grams are given.

Two drugs then are given after the inmate is confirmed to be unconscious: pancuronium bromide, a paralyzing agent, and then potassium chloride to stop the heart.

The department received 500 grams of the drug at a cost of \$2,056. The drug received by the department expires in August 2012.

A federal lawsuit was filed in Arizona challenging the use of drugs from overseas suppliers, saying they may be substandard and could lead to problems during executions.

Nebraska approved lethal injection as its method of execution in 2009. The state hasn't executed an inmate since 1997. There are 11 men on death row, but there is no set execution date at this time for any of those inmates.

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