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Killing Vans Make Process Easier For China's Authorities

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A mobile execution van which carries out the death penalty is seeing a slow but steady business, writes **CLIFFORD COONAN**, in Beijing

THE MAKERS of China's first mobile execution van, a travelling caravan of death in which convicts are dispatched efficiently and cleanly by lethal injection, say sales are not huge but steady, and urge any foreign governments wishing to buy one to get in touch.

"The number of sales of the execution cars is kind of small. We began to sell execution vans five or six years ago, and since then Chengdu, Kunming, Guiyang, Hangzhou, Xi'an and Chongqing local courts have all used our execution cars to carry out the death penalty," said Zhang, who did not wish to give his first name, and who works in the marketing department of Jinguan Auto, a Chongqing-based maker of ambulances, police trucks and armour-plated limos.

China executes more prisoners than any other country in the world. Non-violent crimes such as corruption and tax fraud as well as traditional capital offences such as murder are among 68 crimes that can earn the death penalty in China.

While numbers of executions are a state secret, the Dui Hua Foundation, a San Francisco-based group that works to free Chinese political prisoners, reckons the number of executions in 2007 was between 5,000 and 6,000, compared to 8,000 the previous year.

Zhang said each van was a refitted 17-seat passenger minibus, about seven metres long. So far the company had sold 10 units.

"Execution cars are very expensive – each one costs hundreds of thousands of yuan. Many local courts cannot afford one. And carrying out one execution, plus the medicine, is also expensive. We have not sold our execution cars to foreign countries yet. But if they need one, they could contact our company directly," Zhang said.

The criminal is tied hand and foot to a stretcher, and a cocktail of lethal toxins is injected. There is a video monitoring system to ensure the execution complies with state rules, Zhang said.

Previously, the condemned were executed with a shot to the back of the head. They have told grisly tales of having to wear rubber boots because of the large amounts of blood involved in shooting, and of occasions where prisoners had to be shot multiple times before dying.

Another reason why executioners favoured a different method of killing was the

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those killed were drug traffickers, and many had HIV/Aids.

The executioners worried they would become infected through exposure to blood.

Lethal injection is a much cleaner procedure and use of the bus also makes it easier to extract organs from executed prisoners for transplant, with doctors and nurses on hand to make sure organs are transferred swiftly. This practice has been attacked as inhumane, although the government insists it takes place with permission from donors and their families.

The mobile death chamber means the ultimate sanction can be applied in towns and villages around a particular province, with executioners travelling between different jurisdictions. “Firstly, we established there was demand for execution cars. Then we designed the cars and applied to the government for certification to produce mobile execution vehicles. This procedure is a must,” Zhang added.

Beijing has been trying to reduce reliance on the death penalty. Since 2007, final authority in death sentences has been returned to the Supreme People’s Court, reducing the authority of local courts, which tend to order more executions.

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