



NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
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For immediate release

BCCLA demands policy for VPD Olympic sonic gun

Vancouver, B.C. – A representative for the Vancouver Police Department confirmed to the BCCLA last week that the VPD has acquired an LRAD (Long Range Acoustical Device) crowd control weapon for the 2010 Olympics. He advised that the VPD would be using the device to ensure that police instructions were clearly heard. The sonic gun fires a concentrated beam of sound at its targets that can cause hearing damage and temporarily disrupt vision.

BCCLA President Robert Holmes pointed out that even as the Taser inquiry has not yet reported back, police are acquiring another high tech device that could be used to cause grievous pain. "This crowd control weapon was obtained without any public discussion and without any defined policy for its safe and proper use being set in advance. Tasers were also brought in through such an ill-considered and backwards approach."

To the knowledge of the BCCLA, there have been no public discussions around the purchase and use of an LRAD in Vancouver or British Columbia, no Canadian safety testing of the device, no Canadian approval of the device's use by any agency independent of Canada's police services, and the device has never before been used in a protest scenario by police in Canada.

"On October 22, Vancouver Police Chief Jim Chu said that 'No extraordinary effort will be made to restrict protest because of the Olympics,' but his force is buying new and untested weapons," said Holmes. "A City Councillor said that we were out of line for noting the parallels with Beijing, but Vancouver joins China in embracing these devices. The secret purchase and implementation of the LRAD, in conjunction with Vancouver passing a bylaw that suppresses free expression, reduces the credibility of blandishments from city officials about not interfering with lawful and peaceful demonstrations."

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Backgrounder

The BCCLA has confirmed that the Vancouver Police Department has either obtained, or is in the final steps of obtaining the following two new “tools” for use during the 2010 Olympics.

Armoured personnel carrier - <http://vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20080527/documents/a10.pdf>

On May 27, 2008 the Vancouver Police Department asked Vancouver city council for a one time \$95,000 payment to purchase a bulletproof armoured personnel vehicle. The grant was approved. The total cost of the vehicle was \$345,000, and the remainder of the cost was paid by the Vancouver Police Foundation. Inspector Tony Zanatta of the VPD was quoted as saying: “It’s not a tank, it’s a tool. It’s simply that. It’s a shield, it’s a ballistic shield that’s mobile.”

The LRAD sonic weapon - <http://www.atcsd.com/site/content/view/220/110/>

The VPD confirmed that they had acquired a used LRAD device at a meeting between VPD representatives and members of the BCCLA on November 5, 2009. Media reported on the first North American crowd control LRAD use against protesters at the G20 protests in Pittsburgh in September 2009. It has been used extensively for crowd control by repressive authorities elsewhere in the world. The People’s Republic of China has recently purchased large numbers of LRADs. Purchases like those and endorsements by police in cities like Vancouver have led the manufacturer to announce an anticipated “third consecutive year of record revenues.”

American Technology Corporation, the manufacturer, says that LRAD systems can “transmit powerful deterrent tones.” The sonic gun fires a concentrated beam of sound at its targets that can cause hearing damage and temporarily disrupt vision. Its specifications provide for 152 decibels at 1 meter, allowing for it to be heard 3 kilometers away. ATC says it is “effectively” heard up to 1.25 km away even with up to 88 decibels of background crowd noise.

Other common crowd control weapons that the BCCLA expects will be in the VPD armoury but which we have not been able to confirm will or won’t be available in 2010:

Flexible baton round / “Bean Bag Round” / Rubber Bullets

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/206089.pdf>

The flexible baton round is a small fabric pillow, plastic bullet, wooden dowel, or rubber projectile fired from a normal 12 gauge shotgun or 37/40 millimetre gas launcher, which distributes the normal impact of a shotgun round in an attempt to minimize long-term trauma and penetration of the bullet. In 373 incidents studied by the U.S. Department of Justice, 10 caused fatal injuries, two as a result of police officers mistakenly firing live munitions rather than impact munitions as intended.

CS gas / CN Gas / CR Gas / “Tear Gas”

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/publications/studies/19991401a_en.pdf

Used heavily in Quebec City during the FTAA protests, “tear gas” refers to a class of aerosol based crowd control agents that create a burning sensation in the eyes and a heavy flow of tears. Certain agents, in particular CR gas, can result in temporary blindness.

Pepper spray / OC Spray

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/publications/studies/19991401a_en.pdf

Made infamous at APEC, this spray causes uncontrollable coughing and gasping for breath as well as temporary blindness.