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Pain Ray, Rejected by the Military, Ready to Blast L.A. Prisoners

By [Noah Shachtman](#) [✉](#) August 24, 2010 | 3:02 pm | Categories: [Lasers and Ray Guns](#)



Inmates of the Pitchess

Detention Center, watch your step. If you get out of line, you may get [blasted with an invisible heat ray](#).

The jail's energy weapon is a small-scale version of the Active Denial System, the experimental crowd control device that the [U.S. military brought to Afghanistan](#) — and [then quickly shipped back home](#), after questions mounted about the wisdom of blasting locals with a beam that momentarily puts them in agony. The pain weapon seemed at odds with the military's efforts to appear more humane and measured in the eyes of the Afghan populace.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department not only found those concerns overblown; they used the military's long-standing reluctance to zap Afghans as fodder for the plan to zap Pitchess' prisoners. "I already had contacts at [Active Denial maker] Raytheon who were reeling from the short-sided, self-serving cowardice of people who were more interested in saving face than saving lives, and leveraged it right into getting it into our jails," former LASD Cmdr. Charles "Sid" Heal tells Danger Room.

The LASD has long been a hotbed of advocates for exotic weaponry — everything from [sonic blasters](#) to [spy drones](#). But the Active Denial System has long been of particular interest. Heal calls it the "[Holy Grail of crowd control](#)." He's been [trying for years](#) to get the technology deployed in Los Angeles.

The LASD unveiled the 7½-foot-tall millimeter wave weapon late last week, partially as answer to the 257 inmate-on-inmate assaults at Pitchess so far this year, and the 19 additional assaults on deputies. Sheriff Lee Baca believes the modified pain ray can [break up these incidents before they get out of hand](#). With a range of 80 to 100 feet, the heat beam can blast prisoners that a Taser couldn't hit. "This device will allow us to quickly intervene without having to enter the area and without incapacitating or injuring either combatant," Baca says in a [statement](#).

The National Institute of Justice — the research arm of the U.S. Justice Department — is paying for the six-month trial at Pitchess, part of a larger effort to test technologies that might cut down on inmate violence. "If we try and fail we've sent a message that we care, because even the effort becomes noble!" Heal e-mails. "If we try and succeed we've become heroes in that we accepted a risk the Department of Defense refused — even after they spent \$40 million of the taxpayers money and even while they're killing people, because [they] are unwilling to use it."

Photo: LASD

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Posted by: MikkiT | 08/24/10 | 4:28 pm |

This tech, as I've mentioned before in other posts, seems all but certain to be misused. Seriously, how long does anyone think it's going to take for a few bad apples to try strapping a prisoner into a chair in front of this thing (so that they CAN'T get out of it's way), and then cranking it up to "teach them a lesson".

It just is what it is. A "pain ray" like this, sooner or later, is GOING to be used to TORTURE people. Mark my words. It's only a question of time before we read all sorts of euphamisims like "unauthorised use", or "insuficient training", being used to try to put a better face on what it was REALLY being used for – TORTURE.

And yet, despite dozens of articles written about this "pain ray", not ONE has had the foresight to warn about this very real possibility.

Posted by: Manguy | 08/24/10 | 5:05 pm |

Cool.

Posted by: minstrelmike | 08/24/10 | 5:49 pm |

Anything can be used to torture people.

If this works as advertised, it would be good for crowd control. It is especially needed by LA because those cops tend to exacerbate situations instead of defuse them so advanced weaponry is needed. Other police departments rely on intelligence and training.

(D.O.D. is trying to win a war, not simply win a single confrontation).

Posted by: loudboy77 | 08/24/10 | 6:02 pm |

This is NOT how you do crowd control.... Since this govt is hell-bent on bringing in a new military fascism, take a page from the OTHER book – Brave New World... at least they used SOMA to mellow everyone out instead of blasting people with a PAIN RAY! You guys stand for this in your “democracy”?? what a joke!

Posted by: Scottingham | 08/24/10 | 6:19 pm |

Cruel and unusual are just words.

Posted by: Ikaris | 08/24/10 | 7:07 pm |

This week Helga's House of Pain brings you the Active Denial System.

Next week, a Death Ray sponsored by the Undertakers of America.

Posted by: Bruckley | 08/24/10 | 7:10 pm |

The guy sounds like a complete psychopath. \$10 says Heal winds up behind bars himself one day.

Posted by: deckard68 | 08/24/10 | 7:18 pm |

Only a matter of minutes before bad inmates figure out how to hold the body of the inmate they are attacking in front of them, to cause their victim pain while shielding themselves.

Posted by: bacon_is_not_geek_related | 08/24/10 | 7:40 pm |

This makes me sick. How is it acceptable that the prison system can use a technology, one that's ripe for abuse and torture, that even the military decided was inhumane to use?

You know why things are this way? Because prison is a big profitable business in america: we have the highest incarceration rate in the world and the highest total prison population in the world. 1 in 31 people out of the population is either in jail or has been incarcerated. That's a lot of money for the system right there. We don't focus on rehabilitation or prevention because that's not profitable.

This is capitalism at its finest! Disgusting.

Article was reposted here for spreading the word:

<http://www.leavingamerica.org/2010/08/24/raytheon-to-supply-military-and-prison-paingun/>

Posted by: M3kT3k | 08/24/10 | 8:04 pm |

Im not gonna go on about being a criminal but look if your to dumb to stay out of prison then they should strap you down and "Pain Ray" you. Not because you broke the law but because you got caught. Hell even if you were set up MEH your still in jail and really I dont care. You cost me money in the form of taxes the least you could do is entertain me by getting zapped and the prison putting the video on the web.

Posted by: nutjob | 08/24/10 | 8:09 pm |

Sounds good to me.

Posted by: rhinokitty | 08/24/10 | 8:18 pm |

Why not just cover the floor in electrodes and anytime people get out of hand just flip the switch? If you are going to go for cruel and unusual, do it right!

Posted by: rhinokitty | 08/24/10 | 8:18 pm |

Or just use GAS!?

Posted by: Cochonnerie | 08/24/10 | 8:58 pm |

Give a person any kind of power and there's a strong chance that they'll abuse that power. While in theory it sounds like a great tool, knowing how humans tend to treat each other, I'm not sure this is such a great idea.

Posted by: tehb2 | 08/24/10 | 9:01 pm |

@MikkiT

The device doesn't invite people to torture. If someone is going to torture prisoners, they'd find a way regardless of the fancy technology they had available. Besides I highly doubt that this thing will be easily movable at the whim of any guard that wants to move it. Did you have the foresight to see that your post would just look retarded?

Posted by: nacoran | 08/24/10 | 10:04 pm |

There won't be meaningful prison reform until we stop taking the right to vote away from people who commit a crime.

Posted by: Pirouz | 08/24/10 | 10:37 pm |

I've been hit by a small, older version of this technology at a heavy metal rock concert in 1982 (Dio or Black Sabbath, as I recall it).

It contributed in making me sick after the show.

Out of all the shows I've seen since, I've never seen it used again.

Posted by: coreyl | 08/24/10 | 11:09 pm |

Imagine a boot stamping on a human face — forever.

Posted by: nebraska1099 | 08/25/10 | 12:22 am |

FIRST OFF, Please be aware that the Non-lethal/less than lethal weapons programs at Penn State University offer a parallel course for military and law enforcement. There is only a difference name of technology and the scope and context of strategic application. Military falls under the Dept of Defense and Law Enforcement falls under the Dept of Justice.

As I understand it, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department has long had a specialist in these technologies, one of the greatest experts in the country. He teaches and does field trials for these technologies in the US civilians sector.

It is also my understanding that this technology VIOLATES International treaties because it is exclusively a neurologically targeting pain weapon. Its only function is to cause pain and worse. One reason it violate international treaties is because there is no medical intervention for the treatment of effects available to the targets. Many of the critics of this technology comes from the medical/ethics sectors around the world.

This technology IS a pain inflicting device that, only when used on a low and limited setting, is without physical and mental damage.

Side effects include blindness, tissue burning, deep nerve damage, and paralyzing pain and confusion that prevents a target from withdrawing from the location. Disabled people cannot escape quickly.

Millimeter waves have an affinity for water and therefore these high frequency waves gravitate towards the eyes and central nervous system (brain and spinal cord).

The reason this technology was not used in the middle east military theater, in my opinion, is that it violates international treaties, and once its presence was exposed by media, it left the US open to widespread criticism and further allegations of the use of torture.

Since Noah claims to have caused this technology to be pulled from military use, I request that he have this pulled from use in the civilian sector.

All citizens of the US should be concerned that this is a testing ground for the introduction of this technology to be used against civilians. We have seen the atrocities and even deaths caused by the widespread misuse and abuse of tasers often on handcuffed and shackled people, the elderly, and even on minors. There will be horrible abuses with this technology because, unlike tasers, there are no obvious discharge locations on a living being when used inappropriately or maliciously.

Posted by: cyclone1164 | 08/25/10 | 12:58 am |

Cool!

Posted by: SchreckenLicht | 08/25/10 | 1:13 am |

I had been wondering how long it would be before this device would actually be used in a real-life situation. Interesting though that it will apparently be used on US citizens (well, other than the illegal

aliens that are currently incarcerated in US prisons) in a domestic situation before being used (if ever) in situations for which it was intended, i.e., by the US military in combat zones in other countries.

It seems also that some media outlets are reporting this as a “laser cannon” which also goes to show how little scientific knowledge the average person has these days. There’s quite a bit of difference between microwaves and visible laser light.

With regards to this device causing pain, I guess tasers and pepper spray don’t cause pain...& then there are rubber bullets, beanbags, etc – it seems that most “non-lethal” weapons already make very good use of the infliction of pain.

Posted by: jimbo92107 | 08/25/10 | 2:35 am |

Agonizer technologies should be banned world-wide. They are anathema to a free republic, and if used against foreigners will certainly generate terrific hatred and spur revenge attacks towards whoever uses them.

Furthermore, these weapons are certain to be abused by sadistic fascists like Charles Heal. Guaranteed, watch and see.

Posted by: alphaboy | 08/25/10 | 3:36 am |

Sticks can be used to torture people. This can too, but it’s MUCH more expensive so I bet the real torture is with sticks, not this.

For anyone who thinks this thing is inherently bad because it can be used for evil or cause too much pain, ask yourself if you want our prison systems to be run without any way of putting prisoners in pain... Then imagine the outcome.

Posted by: Idler | 08/25/10 | 8:38 am |

257 assaults SO FAR THIS YEAR and 19 on deputies?

To all the people here saying how nasty a pain ray is,
Ever seen an assault in a place like Pitchess?
You would wet your pants and scream for mommy.

Posted by: Shinzakura | 08/25/10 | 9:00 am |

Eventually, we’re going to hear about the first deputy who gets killed because the thing didn’t power up in time. The LA times will quote a bystander as saying, “Just before the deputy got killed, I heard him shout ‘IMMA CHARGIN MAH LAZER!’”

Posted by: Shinzakura | 08/25/10 | 9:12 am |

@SchreckenLicht: Unfortunately, no one knows what a “maser cannon” is.

@jimbo92107: So, just shooting up the place is preferred? Yeah, I’m sure that some innocent civilian

who we shot accidentally would accept an apology laced with, “Well, we put several rounds through him, but at least we didn’t inconvenience him via nonlethal weapons.”

Posted by: Fitzzzgerald | 08/25/10 | 10:10 am |

Make no mistake, giving prison guards a less-lethal means of obtaining compliance from inmates is going to result in the misuse or overuse of it at some point. For a clear example of this tendency, look no further than the taser.

Before the taser cops could simply beat someone into submission with a nightstick but doing so would leave bruises, blood, broken bones, etc. Using a taser creates plenty of pain but is not nearly as brutal or physically exhausting, not to mention that the officer can deploy it from a safe distance.

Now we see all sorts of incidents where cops are using tasers on old ladies, pregnant women, suspects who were already compliant, people who were not a danger, etc. So, given this history, it would be foolish to believe prison guards wouldn’t overuse and abuse the pain ray. Then the question becomes, do the benefits outweigh the inevitability of abuse?

Posted by: Sasparilla | 08/25/10 | 11:26 am |

The basis of the Star Trek torture booth is at hand.

Posted by: raydar | 08/25/10 | 11:32 am |

I never knew that cowardice had a short side.

Posted by: PeterMerel | 08/25/10 | 11:38 am |

Did we learn nothing at Abu Graib?

This device creates the exact sensation of being boiled alive. It can create that sensation at any distance, in any number of people, for hours, days, or weeks. For any reason. Or no reason at all. If that’s not cruel and unusual punishment, then what is?

Really, think twice. You want to stop violence in prison, stop putting people in there. The USA has the highest incarceration rate in the world, over 1% of the population behind bars, up more than 400% since the 1980s. This is insanity. What Charles Heal and Noah Schactman are promoting here is about as far from “noble” or “heroic” as it is possible to get.

Posted by: VICB3 | 08/25/10 | 12:12 pm |

This thing is an abomination. Anybody who advocates it is a moral cripple. And that in turn raises serious questions about the fitness of those in charge of the Sheriffs Dept.

That said, it could probably be defeated quite easily using a roll of aluminum foil wrapped around ones self to disapate the energy. An accumulation of gum wrappers would work as well. Also Mylar balloons are an intriguing possibility (Tinfoil hat anybody?) Or with some sort of parabolic reflector to

direct the energy back to the emitter and/or operator to blow it out ala a brillo pad in a microwave oven. Or a simple rifle/shotgun shot hitting the emitter would do the job as well.

Further, any agent agency using this thing might very quickly find itself being swarmed by the victims and shown no mercy whatsoever. Crowd rage is always uncontrollable.

This thing can only cause more problems than it solves.

Just a thought.

VicB3

Posted by: smcanon | 08/25/10 | 12:40 pm |

If you are interested in letting Heal (great name) know your opinions of this Pain ray, his email is csheal@lasd.org

Posted by: teeps | 08/25/10 | 2:13 pm |

“Furthermore” Heal continues “this is way easier than beating inmates silly with billy clubs, which has caused considerable problems for my rotator-cuff, and incidentally, my golf swing”. Unabashed, Heal goes on to say “Yeah, I used to whoop up on those boys from Raytheon every Wednesday – they get me tee times over there at Hillcrest. Me and those Raytheon boys spend countless hours talking about how cowardly the military is and figuring out how to spend a lot of the city’s tax payer money on cool new gizmos!” “Awesome!”, added Heal.

Posted by: peakoilwarsdotorg | 08/25/10 | 4:14 pm |

Sounds like the ultimate torture device – effective yet leaves no burn marks and allows the torturer to be insulated from the tortured. I wonder what the impact would be on prisoners who were restrained and forced to be zapped for minutes or hours, how long would it take until they had a heart attack from the shock. Sadists all over the world are delighted by this invention.

Somewhere in hell, Josef Mengele is laughing over this.

“As I have walked among the desperate, rejected and angry young men I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action. But they asked — and rightly so — what about Vietnam? They asked if our nation wasn’t using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today — my own government. For the sake of those boys, for the sake of this government, for the sake of the hundreds of thousands trembling under our violence, I cannot be silent.”

– Martin Luther King, April 4, 1967

Posted by: mfritz0 | 08/25/10 | 7:02 pm |

I'm sure that this weapon is going to prove this type of radiation causes cancerous tumors and cysts (sp). When the state has to pay the hundreds of medical bills for the treatment of cancer and all the wrongful death suits because of it. They will think twice before using it again. Unfortunately, they will use it again, because that's what they do.

Posted by: WinstonCourt | 08/26/10 | 1:20 am |

If you ever wondered what drives a society to have suicide bombers, you are looking at it. There is just something about this that makes you want to bomb the senate or house while it is in session, or the whitehouse, or the mayors' office, or the police department, etc. ...

Posted by: Funkasaurus | 08/26/10 | 6:54 am |

Does it work under water?

Posted by: montesol | 08/26/10 | 3:21 pm |

There is one weakness to this being used as crowd control. It can be knocked down. Do you really think a bunch of rioting, angry prisoners would stop dead in their tracks because of this? Tasers work because they disrupt nerves. It doesn't take much motivation to keep working through pain, especially when your adrenaline is already going. Rush it and knock it down. Cavalry/Infantry rushes vs Artillery usually find in favor of the former. Doomed to fail as crowd control. I mean, can't you just hold up a block of aluminum or a metal table to get to deflect this? What happens if the power is cut during the riot? The concept that technology is what makes you superior is usually held by people who don't know how to email.
