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Police use military megaphone for OWS

ROCCO PARASCANDOLA, TRACY CONNOR

Friday, November 18, 2011

The NYPD's anti-protest arsenal includes an amplifier developed for the military — but it's being used as a loudspeaker, not a "sound cannon" to break up crowds.

It's called a Long Range Acoustical Device and it has the ability to blast a small area with 110 decibels of sound — the equivalent of a power saw at close range.

But police officials say that's not how it's being used at Zuccotti Park and other protest sites, where it functions as the world's clearest megaphone.

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"We don't use it to disrupt. We don't use it as some horrible noisemaker," said Police Department spokesman Paul Browne.

"We set it up away from where a crowd is. We create a 50-foot safety zone. It sends out a clear, uniform message that can be heard for several blocks."

The California company that invented the device says it was developed after the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen in 2000 so naval ships could communicate with anyone approaching.

The system sends out a highly magnified beam of sound in much the way a lens focuses a beam of light.

The company is loathe to say it can be used as a weapon or discuss the potential physical effects of being bombarded with ear-splitting noise at close range.

"Can your car horn be used as a weapon? Can you play loud noise with the LRAD? Absolutely," said Scott Stuckey, vice president of business development.

"They could cover their ears if it's too loud."

Critics say the devices have the potential for misuse by civilian agencies and can cause hearing loss, headaches or nausea.

The New York Civil Liberties Union said the \$35,000 devices should only be used for communication purposes.

"It clearly can be used to disperse people," said Christopher Dunn, associate legal director. "They cause physical pain to make people move."

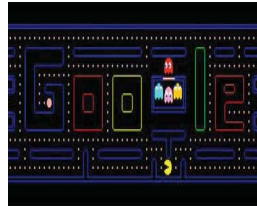
He said the group has received no reports of the NYPD using either of its two LRADs as a weapon.

"Making announcements that people can hear is always good," he said. "Using a sonic cannon to disperse people is not."

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