



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program



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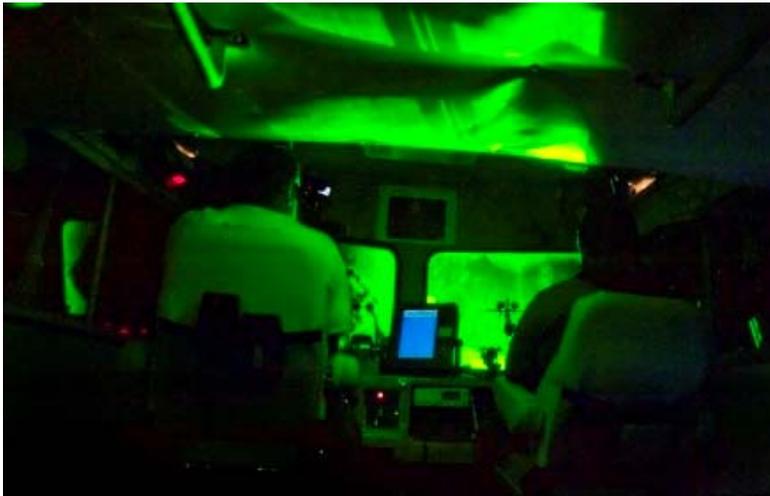
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### Optical Distracters Give Warfighters Escalation-of-Force Options

By Nancy Koreen

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*U.S. Navy Sailors evaluate the effectiveness of a non-lethal optical distracter as it shines into a vessel's windshield during a recent maritime test bed in Panama City, Fla.*

*Official U.S. Navy Photo*

As U.S. troops overseas continue to face the daily challenges of irregular warfare, non-lethal optical distracters are providing critical escalation-of-force options in situations where warfighters have only seconds to distinguish between adversaries and innocent civilians and act accordingly.

An optical distracter is a long-range optical interruption device. Optical distracters, like many non-lethal weapons, provide an escalation-of-force option for warfighters, helping to minimize casualties and collateral damage. Non-lethal optical distracters are visible laser devices that have reversible optical effects on human targets. These types of non-blinding laser devices use highly directional optical

energy to temporarily overwhelm a target's visual senses, provide an unequivocal non-verbal warning and give the target an opportunity to clarify intent.

The Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program (JNLWP) has sponsored the research and development of these optical laser devices as part of its mission to facilitate outfitting warfighters with operationally suitable and effective non-lethal weapons. The Department of Defense defines non-lethal weapons as "weapons, devices and munitions that are explicitly designed and primarily employed to incapacitate targeted personnel or materiel immediately, while minimizing fatalities, permanent injury to personnel and undesired damage to property in the target area or environment. Non-lethal weapons are intended to have reversible effects on personnel and materiel."

U.S. troops can use optical distracters in a variety of situations where they need to hail and warn individuals or groups at extended ranges. Optical distracters have been especially helpful in Iraq and Afghanistan at checkpoints and in convoy operations, when drivers have failed to heed signals to stop or slow down. Optical distracters provide an escalation-of-force option in these situations. The warfighter can shine the laser at the vehicle windshield at extended ranges, causing temporary optical incapacitation to the driver. If the driver is an innocent civilian in the wrong place at the wrong time, this very clear signal will likely make him stop. If he keeps coming full speed toward the checkpoint, the warfighter then knows that the driver likely has malicious intentions, and the warfighter can escalate his response to handle the threat appropriately.

Sergeant Major Bryan Battaglia, U.S. Joint Forces Command, knows first-hand about the effectiveness of optical distracters. He served as the Sergeant Major of the 2d Marine Expeditionary Force (forward) in Iraq in 2007. "During 2007, the green-laser optical distracter was fielded to Multi-National Force-West as a tactical-level non-lethal capability and a needed step in our escalation-of-force process to minimize unintended casualties," explained Sgt. Maj. Battaglia.



*Sergeant Major  
Bryan Battaglia  
Official USMC Photo*

"I found this tactical non-lethal weapon, when properly employed, to be amazingly effective for turret gunners, foot patrols and entry control point sentries in determining an individual's intent while being able to maintain better

distance and standoff compared to existing escalation-of-force steps," said Sgt. Maj. Battaglia. "Another intangible is the decrease in weapon use during escalation-of-force incidents resulting in an overall decrease in casualties. I cannot attribute the optical distracter as the sole mechanism for escalation-of-force casualty reduction, but I feel confident in saying it was a significant factor."

The Services are currently fielding several different optical distracter devices. The Army and Marine Corps have fielded optical distracters to units in Iraq and Afghanistan for use at vehicle checkpoints and during convoy operations to warn individuals approaching security zones. The Air Force has fielded optical distracters to its Security Forces for patrol missions. In addition, the Navy plans to start fielding optical distracters this summer to use as warning systems to determine intent of potentially dangerous individuals or to alert local populations that Navy forces are operating in the area.



*A staff member from the Army's Target Behavioral Response Laboratory targets a vehicle driver with an optical distracter during a recent simulation at Picatinny Arsenal, N.J.  
U.S. Army photo by Todd Mozes*

All JNLWP technologies, including lasers, are characterized, evaluated and reviewed to ensure that they are both operationally suitable and effective. Optical distracters have undergone extensive human effects testing to determine at what distances they are safe to use without causing permanent eye damage. All fielded optical distracters have an NOHD, or nominal ocular hazard distance, which indicates the minimum distance required for a laser to be safe to the human eye.



*The LA-9/P combines the GBD-IIIC optical distracter with a Safety Control Module, which automatically turns off the laser when an individual comes within the beam's minimum safety distance.*

*JNLWD photo by Wanda Napier*

The JNLWP is also working to incorporate engineering safety controls to ensure eye safety even within the NOHD, for example, by automatically adjusting the power based on the distance to the target. For instance, the GBD-IIIC, one type of green laser the Services are using, is being retrofitted to include a Safety Control Module. The Safety Control Module will prevent inadvertent lasing by shutting off the system when a target enters the nominal ocular hazard distance. Once modified, the laser will be referred to as the LA/9P.

"Optical distracters and other non-lethal weapons give warfighters crucial escalation-of-force options between shouting and shooting," said Colonel Tracy Tafolla, Director of the Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Directorate. "They help minimize casualties and collateral damage across the full spectrum of military operations—everything from full-scale combat to humanitarian and disaster relief missions."



*Colonel Tracy Tafolla  
Official USMC Photo*

As the increase in irregular and hybrid warfare continues to bring combat into crowded urban areas and villages, optical distracters and other non-lethal weapons can help warfighters discern intent, discriminate targets and non-lethally deter potentially dangerous individuals.