

Will a high-velocity, DNA-tagging police pellet gun deter protesters?

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Gun control is a hot button issue, so it makes sense that police and security firms would look toward expanding effective methods of nonviolent interaction. This becomes particularly important during riot situations with a lot of people and confusion, where police are often outnumbered and overwhelmed. Once there is a subtle shift in attitude from police monitoring the situation to feeling threatened by the crowds, there is greater potential for violence, which can escalate to really dangerous situations.

It can be hard to arrest protesters during a riot, and trying to detain them in the moment can put the officers and offender in danger. In order to minimize risk, SelectaMark, a UK security company, designed a [High Velocity System](#) [1] that shoots uniquely-coded DNA pellets that leave an identifying mark on the perpetrator upon contact but leaves them unharmed.

"On contact with the target the uniquely-coded SelectaDNA solution leaves a synthetic DNA trace mark that will enable the relevant authorities to confirm or eliminate that person from their involvement in a particular situation and could ultimately lead to arrest and prosecution," according to Andrew Knights, Selectamark Managing Director.

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The product will be available in either pellet or rifle form, and officers can shoot from a range of 93 feet to 133 feet reliably, according to the company. This pistol is powered by a 12g powerlet, offering up to 20 shots. The pellets are available in containers containing 14 pellets with identical DNA trace marks, which can be identified using a UV light.

The markers came from the SelectaDNA markers used to protect electronics from thieves, so it's available, if not in this form.

There isn't a lot of actual information about these DNA markers available. The company claims they leave the person unharmed, but that seems like a relative term. A pellet is better than being shot, hit with a baton, or tazed. *Technically*, it's probably less harmful than those options, but getting shot with a pellet gun probably isn't going to feel *great*. Getting hit with anything that says "high velocity" in the name is not going to tickle.

But Kasey, you're probably saying, these are people who are participating in riots, so who cares? Well, kind reader, to that I say you have to factor in two things. One, obviously, is that innocent bystanders could catch one of these. Secondly, what's to stop the police from using these to disperse an otherwise peaceful crowd?

Furthermore, how do you track these people once the riot is over? Are you going to scan every single person in the city? State? Country? It seems like a rather inefficient system.

A lot of doubts about this—admittedly interesting—technology could be dismissed with more information from the company about how the pellets work. The company doesn't say what happens if the pellet hits your clothes and you change or how the DNA in the pellets works. It also doesn't tackle whether this will be admissible in court or any of the legality issues.

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Yes, this is better than being shot, tazed, or hit, but all it does is mark the perpetrator. It doesn't stop them from doing whatever they're doing. It's going to sting, but adrenaline is a powerful thing. I'm not sold on the effectiveness. It will free up an officer's attention so they can shoot pellets at people they want to find later while focusing on any imminent danger. However, the image of a cop casually shooting someone with a pellet so he can get back to more violent ways is a tad disconcerting. It may be useful (potentially) for noting who was there, but until there are more answers than questions about how the technology actually works, it doesn't seem worth the expense.

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[1] <http://www.selectadna.co.uk/selectadna-high-velocity-dna-tagging-system.html>