



✔ Fact Check

Minnesota authorities used LRAD sound weapon on anti-ICE protesters. But that's not the full story

In extreme cases, sonic weapons can cause nausea, dizziness, and even permanent damage. In this case, officials used it to declare unlawful assembly.

By **Taija PerryCook**

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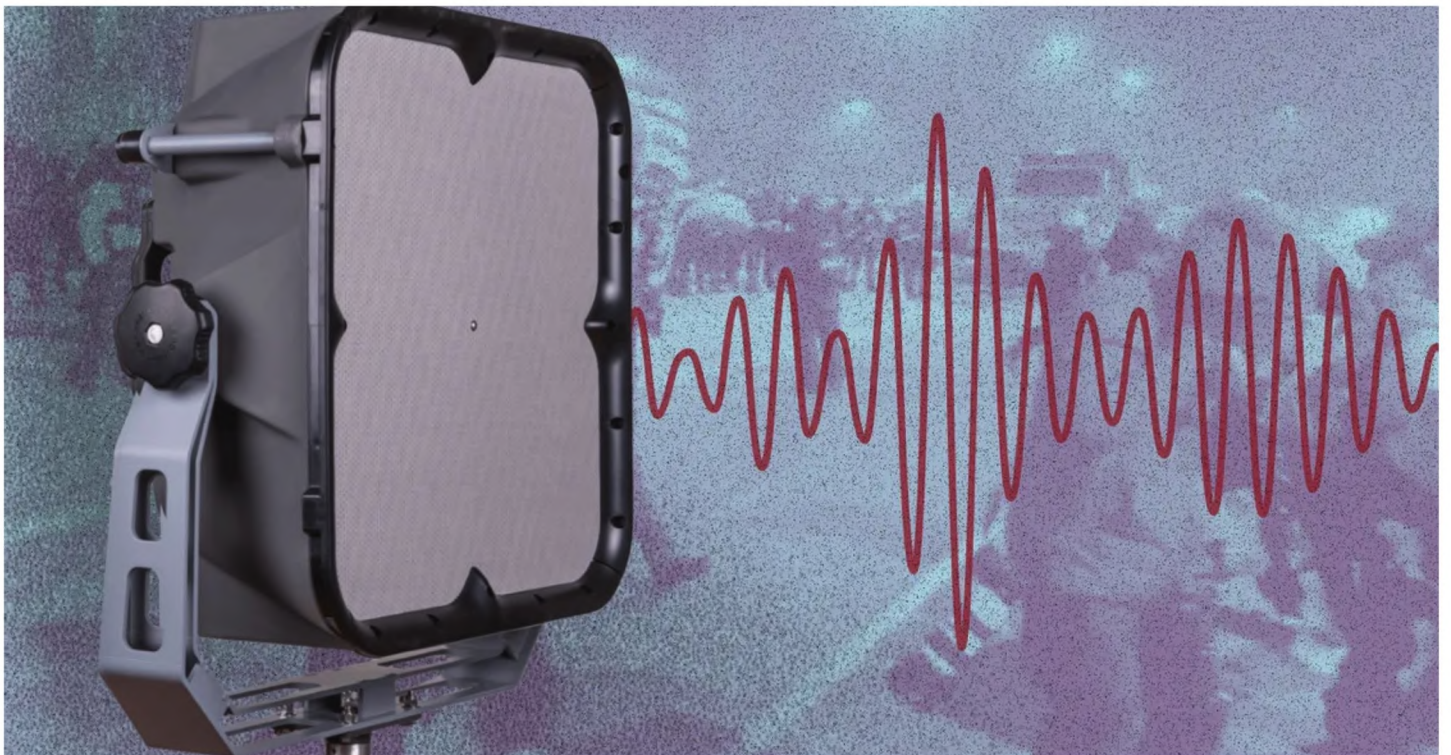


Image courtesy of genasys.com and YouTube account [@IRTMedia](https://www.youtube.com/@IRTMedia)

Claim:

In January 2026, Minnesota State Patrol used a Long Range Acoustic Device on anti-U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement protesters in an "unlawful assembly."

Rating:



True

[About this rating](#) 

Context

The LRAD is capable of inflicting bodily harm including nausea, dizziness and even organ damage and permanent hearing loss in extreme cases. However, the Minnesota State Patrol claimed it did not use the device in a "deterrent setting" — meaning it was used only to make the announcement of unlawful assembly (and not as a sonic weapon with intent to cause bodily harm). Some internet users incorrectly claimed it was ICE or the National Guard that operated the LRAD. That was incorrect; it was the Minnesota State Patrol.

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As the U.S. Department of Homeland Security continued its violent **immigration crackdown in Minnesota** in January 2026, a video spread online purportedly showing law enforcement officials using a sonic weapon called the "Long Range Acoustic Device," or LRAD, to disperse a crowd of protesters.

For example, one Bluesky user **wrote (archived)**: "What the hell? Is this really the Minnesota State Police testing LRAD on protestors? LRAD is a long-range acoustic device. Sound as a weapon. Testing weapons on civilians is a war crime. If this is legit, it means weapons of war against US citizens."

Numerous other social media users shared the footage on **Facebook** and **Reddit (archived, archived)**, implying that authorities exposed protesters to inhumane sound levels. CBS News published **a story (archived)** on Jan. 27 in which a retired Marine colonel reportedly said: "The LRAD is like a loudspeaker, but it focuses the sound in a narrow cone, so that if you're inside the cone, it's extremely loud."



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What the hell?

Is this really the Minnesota State Police testing LRAD on protestors?

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In short, the Minnesota State Patrol confirmed it used an LRAD at a standoff with protesters in Maple Grove on Jan. 26. As a result, we've rated the claim true. The Minnesota State Patrol and local police in Maple Grove, a Minneapolis suburb, told Snopes over email that the device was used to announce dispersal orders, not inflict bodily harm as a sonic weapon.

Historically used for military operations since its emergence in 2003, an LRAD is a specialized tool that emits high-frequency sound waves capable of **causing distress** to the human body, including nausea, dizziness and even organ damage and permanent hearing loss in extreme cases, depending on the device's settings. Police have also used the technology as a form of crowd control — or in this case, to make amplified announcements.

Some social media users expressed confusion over whether Immigration and Customs Enforcement, DHS, the National Guard or local police deployed the LRAD. Maple Grove Police confirmed via email that DHS and ICE were not involved in the planning or response to the protest. The Minnesota National Guard said via an emailed statement that it was not part of any activity near that location on Jan. 26.

LRAD used to order dispersal, not as deterrent

The Minnesota State Patrol confirmed via email it did use an LRAD device on Jan. 26; however, officers used it "to declare unlawful assembly only, and not in any other manner." Maple Grove police confirmed via email that it was not used in "a deterrent setting (i.e., to produce very loud atonal noises or sounds meant to disperse a crowd)."

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We also asked the State Patrol whether or how frequently it used the device in the past, and the agency responded: "We have used the LRAD system when we have provided mutual aid to other agencies with civil unrest and crowd control messaging, along with our own use of weather emergencies and crowd control messaging on the Capitol grounds."

The crowd was gathered outside a hotel in **Maple Grove**, where protesters **claimed** Gregory Bovino — **then the "commander"** of the crackdown in Minnesota — was staying.

The footage of the incident was consistent with the State Patrol's account. **Less than a minute** after the announcement of a test of the LRAD, a State

Patrol lieutenant declared the gathering an "unlawful assembly." At no point did the device emit an intense, prolonged sound.

"This is a test of the Long Range Acoustic Device, LRAD. One, two, three," a voice declared in an authentic, widely-shared livestream of the incident **(at 1:58:47).**"

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The account that uploaded the livestream, **IRT Media**, also **followed up** (**archived**) on X on Jan. 27, writing that the "LRAD was not used at full volume."

Who was responsible for deploying the device?

Some internet users **said** (**archived**) it was ICE or the **National Guard** (**archived**) that deployed the LRAD. That wasn't accurate — it was the Minnesota State Patrol.

According to Minnesota State Patrol spokesperson Mike Lee, the incident "was an assist to Maple Grove Police Department." The Maple Grove Police Department said via email that "the Minnesota State Patrol owns and operates the LRAD device that is being referenced," and reiterated that "the LRAD device was used to declare the unlawful assembly by amplified voice and not in any other manner."

Maple Grove police Commander Jonathan Wetternach said:

During the event, law enforcement personnel determined the actions of the protestors were jeopardizing public safety and the event was deemed an unlawful assembly. The protestors criminally damaged a hotel sign with a shovel, threw objects at the officers, and breached barrier tap. Therefore, an officer on scene announced a dispersal order to the crowd participants using an LRAD in amplifier mode. The device is used to ensure that the content of the dispersal message is clear and heard by the participants. Multiple orders were provided to allow a reasonable time to disperse.

Contrary to some social media or other media reports of the incident, the LRAD-type device was not used in a deterrent setting (i.e., to produce very loud atonal noises or sounds meant to disperse a crowd).

The Maple Grove Police Department requested the assistance of the Minnesota State Patrol for the incident to include their vehicle equipped with the LRAD device. Minnesota State Patrol troopers are specially trained in the use of the LRAD device for its intended safe use.

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Did the device cause bodily distress to protesters?

Lee said Minnesota State Patrol used an LRAD 500X-RT, which, he explained, does not have a decibel level display. However, according to Lee, it was in the "yellow" range (of green/yellow/red) and was "loud enough over the whistles and other noise makers produced by the protesters."

The **data sheet for the LRAD 500X-RT** stated that the device provides "powerful, intelligible voice communication up to 2,000 meters." Lee said the protesters were at "a minimum of approximately 40 feet away at the time of the announcement" — just over 12 meters.

According to Physicians for Human Rights, the LRAD **can cause pain at 20 meters** and permanent hearing loss at close range (5 meters or less). Protesters on Jan. 26 who were within 12-20 meters of the LRAD may have experienced physical pain, though it was not possible to independently verify the precise decibel range of the device used.

Research on sonic weapon injuries published in the Chinese Journal of Traumatology in April 2025 illustrated how the degree of bodily stress caused by sonic weapons greatly depends on the decibel level, as follows:

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Low-frequency noise at 90–120 dB for 1 min can cause irritability and restlessness in humans, 110–130 dB can cause intestinal pain and nausea, 140–150 dB can cause severe tissue damage, and the injury caused by 170 dB is similar to blast injury. Mid-frequency noise can cause resonance in body cavities, however, high- and ultrahigh-frequency noise can cause extreme increases in body temperature, leading to tissue burns and dehydration, both of which can also cause bubbles formation in the tissues.

In sum ...

The Minnesota State Patrol and the Maple Grove Police Department launched a coordinated effort to disperse a crowd of anti-ICE protesters that they declared an "unlawful assembly." The Minnesota State Patrol used an LRAD as a voice amplifier to order dispersal, but said it did not use the device in a "deterrent setting" specifically intended to cause bodily harm.

The Minnesota State Patrol said protesters were within 40 feet of the device, meaning that those in closest proximity may have experienced physical pain.

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