



This Company Wants to Sell High-Tech Lasso Weapons to Schools and Hospitals

[vice.com/en/article/m7vpjb/this-company-wants-to-sell-high-tech-lasso-weapons-to-schools-and-hospitals](https://www.vice.com/en/article/m7vpjb/this-company-wants-to-sell-high-tech-lasso-weapons-to-schools-and-hospitals)



The Washington Post / Getty Images

Wrap Technologies is the company behind BolaWrap, a hand-held lasso device used by some US police departments to subdue “noncompliant individuals” and other people they perceive as a threat. But while the weapon is currently a regulated firearm and only being sold to law enforcement and the military, the company has plans to make BolaWrap available to mental health institutions, private security personnel, homeowners, teachers and other professionals.

Emails obtained by Motherboard using a public records request show that at least one hospital already has shown interest in getting a Bolawrap.

During an earnings call with investors last October, former Wrap President and CEO Tom Smith told shareholders the company sent an application to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) requesting a determination for whether its newest model, the Bolawrap 150, will be regulated under the National Firearm Act (NFA). Smith, who stepped

down as President and CEO in late January, told shareholders a ruling removing certain ATF restrictions could open up new markets for the company. Wrap expects a determination this spring, Smith said.

Wrap has previously come under fire for its BolaWrap 100 device, with mental health advocates condemning its use by police against people experiencing emotional distress. The high-tech device was inspired by the bola weapon traditionally used to hunt wild animals, and fires a Kevlar tether with four-pronged metal hooks at hundreds of feet per second to wrap and restrain the target's body.

The BolaWrap 150 functions similarly to its predecessor, but its release mechanism relies on airbag-like technology rather than gunpowder.

Wrap did not acknowledge Motherboard's request for a copy of the application submitted to the ATF or respond to a request for comment. Motherboard was also unable to obtain a copy of the company's application through a public records request, with the agency claiming it has no responsive documents.

The company appears to be expecting the ATF to rule in its favor. According to its website, Wrap receives "countless requests" to purchase the BolaWrap by individuals, private security, bail bondsman, fugitive recovery agents, mental health institutions, places of worship, and schoolteachers. "[T]he company does anticipate making the BolaWrap available to other professionals in the future," its website states.

In a 2021 presentation to investors, Wrap considered "20,000,000 private security workers worldwide" and "4,900,000+ elementary, secondary & post secondary school teachers" as "future opportunities."

Some advocate groups are pushing back against the prospect of lassoing children. Sarah Abdelaziz, Director of Activists in Residence of the Abolitionist Teaching Network described Wrap's plans as "absolutely terrifying."

"I think that anyone's initial reaction to the idea of being lassoed is terror, rightly so," they told Motherboard. "That conjures images of another time."

Documents obtained by Motherboard through public record requests show St. Luke's Hospital in Duluth, Minnesota, is preemptively seeking training from the Minneapolis Police Department to prepare for when the BolaWrap "becomes available for hospitals." Disability justice advocates, however, promote autonomous, person-centered, community-based groups that are run by people most directly impacted by harmful systems rather than forced institutionalization and coercion.

From: "Rust, Tylin" [REDACTED]@slhduluth.com>

To: "daniel.dick@minneapolismn.gov" [REDACTED]@minneapolismn.gov>

Subject: BolaWrap

Date: Tue, 21 May 2019 12:35:01 +0000

Importance: Normal

Good Morning,

My name is Tylin M. Rust, I am from the St. Luke's Hospital Security team in Duluth.

I saw that you Police Department was hosting a BolaWrap Demonstration on June 5th. Our Hospital is looking into investing in this product for our campus when it becomes available for hospitals. I was curious on if you would be hosting a webcast or video conference of some-sort- or an in person event only?

Best regards,

Tylin M. Rust
Security Officer; Security Services

The push comes at a time when Wrap is struggling to convince large police departments to adopt the BolaWrap. As of August 2020, the Los Angeles Police Department was the only such department in the US to undergo trials with the weapon. But, according to a shareholder lawsuit filed against the company, LAPD's report on the program claimed the BolaWrap was ineffective, expensive and sparingly used in the field. The lawsuit cited a report that claimed over a six-month period, "200 BolaWrap devices in the hands of 1,100 LAPD officers in the field were only used nine times, and only worked once." Plaintiffs alleged that the company failed to disclose this "bad news" to shareholders.

After a pilot program, the Minneapolis Police Department decided not to purchase the weapon, citing the "current climate" and "budget constraints" as reasons, the documents obtained by Motherboard show.

Wrap's sales strategy is familiar. In 1993, Tom Smith and his brother Rick co-founded Taser International, best known for selling stun guns. Originally, stun guns were powered with gunpowder and regulated under the National Firearm Act. However, the ATF declassified a newer design that relied on a compressed-gas-based propellant. Because of this declassification, private security and private citizens can purchase stun guns in some states.

Cops in schools were also increasingly armed with stun guns throughout the 2000s, and have repeatedly come under fire for electrocuting Black and brown youth. Last week, a school police officer tased a 14-year student as he appeared to be walking away from a fight at Middletown High School in Pennsylvania. In November 2021, a school police officer at

Little Elm High School in Dallas, Texas pepper sprayed and tased a Black teenage boy until he lay unresponsive on the ground during a protest against administrators whom allegedly punished a student for speaking out against sexual harassment.

Tech

This High-Tech Police Lasso Is Being Condemned By Mental Health Experts

Ella Fassler

06.04.21



Abdelaziz said the BolaWrap would similarly disproportionately impact marginalized communities. "We know the demographic that this will be used on: Black and brown students, full stop," they said. "The evidence that we have is that Black and brown students are treated as though they are less than objects in most of the schools, sometimes by their teachers who are supposed to be their advocates and know them well. Oftentimes by [school resource officers], oftentimes by administration."

The trend of arming teachers and school police with the BolaWrap would directly contradict many students' demands for police-free schools, they said.

"Rather than investing in harmful and terrifying technologies like the BolaWrap, schools should listen to the needs of their students and staff to see where investments should be made," said Abdelaziz, referring to students who have demanded more mental health services and smaller classroom sizes. "Ultimately, if schools invest in having their key stakeholders—educators, students and their families—at the center of decision making, real school safety can and will occur."

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