

SB 937 (Gonzalez) Restrictions on Flash-bang Devices and Explosive Breaching Charges

SUMMARY

Senate Bill (SB) 937 would ban the use of flash-bang devices for crowd control by federal, state, and local law enforcement, except under specified circumstances. The bill further mandates comprehensive and transparent public reporting whenever these grenades are deployed.

In addition, SB 937 would ban the use of flash-bang devices and explosive breaching charges for the purpose of immigration enforcement, unless used in compliance with the California Values Act (SB 54, De Leon, Statutes of 2017).

EXISTING LAW

Assembly Bill (AB) 48 (Gonzalez, Statutes of 2021) restricts peace officers from deploying kinetic energy projectiles (KEPs), including rubber bullets and beanbag rounds, as well as chemical agents such as tear gas, unless specified public safety conditions are met. The bill also requires public reporting within 60 days of each use of these items.

Existing law bans the possession and use of explosives or destructive devices with the exception of any peace officer on duty and acting within the scope and course of their employment (PEN 18800).

BACKGROUND/PROBLEM

Flash-bang devices, also known as stun grenades, concussion grenades, noise flash diversionary devices, blast-balls, sting balls, or stinger grenades, are explosive pyrotechnic devices developed for military use that can be deployed by hand or as projectiles. They produce a blinding flash of light, sudden loud noise, blast overpressure, and in some cases disperse rubber shrapnel or balls. These “less lethal” flash-bang devices are designed to stun, distract, or disperse individuals in crowd settings and to breach enclosed rooms.

While these military-style explosive devices are classified as “less lethal,” they pose significant danger to public safety and to peace officers when used improperly or deployed in an unsafe manner.

Close proximity to these devices can cause serious blast injuries such as eardrum rupture, thermal burns, lung injuries, amputations, fractures, and internal hemorrhaging.[1] When deployed as projectiles via grenade launchers and aimed incorrectly they can result in traumatic brain injuries and head wounds.

A ProPublica investigation found that at least 50 people in the US have been seriously injured, maimed, or killed by flash-bangs since 2000.[2] This includes a police officer who died from internal bleeding in 2011, and individuals protesting federal immigration actions who have been permanently maimed by flash-bangs in recent months.[3]

[1] https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/REPORT-Lethal-in-Disguise-2-PHR-INCLO-March-2023.pdf
[2] https://www.propublica.org/article/flash-bangs
[3] https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-07-11/less-lethals-cause-lasting-physical-psychological-harm-critics-say

While current law places critical safety restrictions and training requirements on the use of tear gas and KEPs by law enforcement, there is no state law requiring training, oversight, or safety protections for the use of flash-bang grenades.

The lack of regulation of these dangerous devices also extends to explosives, such as detonating cords, sheet explosives, and shaped charges, which are used by law enforcement to breach doors and windows. A recent use of these militiary weapons by the U.S. Border Patrol in Los Angeles, put the lives of a mother and her young children at risk.[4]

The indiscriminate use of explosives and flash-bangs by federal officers for the purposes of immigration enforcement continues to put residents in unsafe situations, spread fear in communities, and result in avoidable injuries.[5]

SOLUTION

Senate Bill 937 addresses a significant gap in existing law by restricting the circumstances under which state and federal law enforcement agencies may use flash-bangs for crowd dispersal. The bill prioritizes public safety and reduces the risk of serious injury during crowd management operations by:

- Limiting use to situations involving a threat to life or serious bodily injury, or to safely bring a dangerous unlawful situation under control.
- Requiring officers to receive proper training on their deployment.
- Allowing use only after de-escalation techniques and less forceful alternatives have failed, and only when authorized by a commanding officer.
- Mandating repeated audible warnings in multiple languages before deployment.
- Prohibiting aiming indiscriminately into crowds or at the head, neck, or vital organs.
- Requiring the immediate extraction of individuals in distress and the prompt provision of medical assistance.
- Mandating public reporting of each use within 60 days including a justification for each use.

Finally, SB 937 will prohibit the use of flash-bangs and explosive breaching charges for the purposes of immigration enforcement unless done in compliance with the California Values Act.

SUPPORT

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American Friends Service Committee
Berkeley Friends Meeting
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Public Defenders Association
Coalition for Human Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
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[4] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jun/27/california-home-raid-huntington-park

[5] https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-06-02/an-alarming-show-of-force-san-diego-elected-officials-denounce-hsi-work-raids