

Police demand water cannon to quell summer of discontent

Sean O'Neill Crime Editor
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Water cannon could be available to riot police in England this summer amid fears of public disorder over austerity and welfare cuts.

Scotland Yard has asked the Home Office to approve the acquisition of two German-made water cannon vehicles, capable of holding 9,000 litres of water each, which would be used to soak rioters with powerful jets of spray.

The purchase of a third cannon, which would be held as a “national asset” available to other police forces for deployment in emergency situations, is also being considered.

The Metropolitan Police had hoped to have the vehicles by next month in case of disorder arising from protests which are planned for London before the G8 summit in Northern Ireland.

It is understood that, although Home Office ministers are broadly in favour of the proposal, they have asked for more details on how the riot control weapon would be deployed. The Home Office has to license the use of any police weapon. The pace of discussions in Whitehall over water cannon has been stepped up as fears mount of a summer of disorder. The latest meeting between the Met, the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers took place last Friday.

An intensive training programme is also taking place to teach police officers how to operate in situations where water cannon are deployed.

Ostensibly intended to train the 4,000 officers who are going to assist the Police Service of Northern Ireland during the G8 summit, the training programme will also prepare police for the expected deployment of water cannon across the rest of Britain.

The PSNI has six water cannon vehicles which are sent out in pairs and have been used to quell disorder, especially during sectarian clashes linked to the province’s marching season. Two of those vehicles are currently at a military training camp in south-east England for police training.

Sources in Ulster say that the water cannon are not intended to be aimed directly at people but fired in a way that drenches rioters, persuading them to go home because they are cold and wet. Nevertheless, there is nervousness in Government that deployment of such tactics would fundamentally change the image of British policing, making it appear more militaristic.

Scotland Yard sources insist water cannon would be “rarely used” and would be of little use in fast-moving disturbances such as the August 2011 riots.

But they say cannons “have a role” and could have been deployed in some scenarios, such as when police were under siege in Tottenham at the start of the 2011 disturbances or at the Countryside Alliance disturbances outside parliament in 2004.

After the 2011 riots, the Met stepped up riot training and increased the availability of plastic bullet guns. It is now hoping to buy the Ziegler Wasserwerfer 9000, which cost £1.3 million each. It holds 9,000 litres and is equipped with searchlights and CCTV cameras.

A Met spokesman said there was no prospect of water cannon being available in London before the expected G8 protests next month.

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Michael Daventry

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and water pistols whilst we arm our police force to the hilt to attack our own citizens. I often don't agree with the protesters but sometimes the polices heavy handedness make things worse.

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Stephen G Spencer

37 minutes ago

While we are it soaking rich tax avoiders might just pay for these repressive monsters....

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nicholas jones

5 hours ago

And the questions of course is - why is the default to buy German equipment rather than tendering for British companies to supply.

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Joseph Wyndham

8 hours ago

It wouldn't have stopped the summer rioters in London a few years ago.

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Robin Lewis

3 hours ago

@Joseph Wyndham No but it would have given the rioters a good wash which is what many of them needed.

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Kurt Saunders

9 hours ago

The Police should get whatever equipment they need because it wont be if, but when and how many riots there will be on the streets.

The more the politicians refuse to listen to the public and deliver policies they want, the more riots we will have in the future.

.....And a message to all police forces; Please dont stand by watching the rioters this time, get stuck in and use the water cannon's and make hard arrests on trouble makers.

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Sean De Lear

10 hours ago

pathetic that we cant make them here, not so difficult

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TS1

15 hours ago

We also have some Challenger tanks going spare...

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