

Dangerous Weaponry Used on Refugees with No Legal Status in Calais

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The chemical compound contained in expired weapons may no longer be approved, write Anna Feigenbaum and Vyvian Raoul.

Infamous street-artist [Banksy](#) made headlines again this week with his [latest illicit artwork](#). The piece, which was painted opposite the French Embassy in London, features a crying Cosette from Les Misérables, her tears the result of a cloud of gas that engulfs her. Like his recent pieces on the edge of [The Jungle camp and around Calais](#), it's another comment on the refugee crisis. This piece takes a pop at the French government's handling of the situation – and, in particular, their use of public order weaponry against the people that live in the makeshift encampment.

✖ In a first for the elusive street artist, his piece featured a code. By scanning the code with a QR reader, viewers were linked to a [Youtube video](#) of , rubber bullets and concussion grenades being fired indiscriminately into the camp, which is situated on dunes on the outskirts of the Port au Calais. [Despite video evidence](#), just last week police spokesman Steve Barbet issued a denial against such tactics: 'It's not in our interest to use teargas unless it's absolutely necessary to restore public order, and it is never used in the camp itself,' he [told the Guardian](#).



Banksy has another link to The Jungle: when his Dismaland exhibition was dismantled after its five week summer run, the artist sent leftover materials to the camp to be turned into shelters. The materials were accompanied by Dismaland crew members, who have so far constructed 12 dwellings, a community centre and a children's play area, in a project that has become known as '[Dismalaid](#)'.

When the crew visited, they found evidence everywhere of weapons being used inside the camp. An anonymous member of the of the Dismalaid crew told us: 'It's impossible to walk from one end of the camp to the other without stumbling upon various bits of depleted weaponry – from canisters to rubber bullet casings to spent cartridges, they're all over the place. And everyone you speak to has stories of the Gendarmes firing them indiscriminately into the camp – seemingly with little reason, very often.'



And when crew members used [Riot](#), a civic forensics project designed to help civilians

identify riot control weapons, they found out that the weapons being used were not designed for shooting at people at close range or in confined spaces like tents, lorries, tunnels and fenced in border zones. Impact munitions like rubber bullets have strict guidelines on distance and angles for firing. Likewise, how 'safe' or harmful tear gas is depends on the amount of chemicals released, how close you are to where it is discharged, as well as on how much air is moving through the area. Because refugee camps like The Jungle are overcrowded and heavily secured with fencing, razor wire and guards, when tear gas is set off, no one can escape very far.

Being trapped by tear gas can lead to serious injuries and even to death, as the killing of a [20-year-old Eritrean woman](#) in Calais last July made clear. The young woman was hit by a car while fleeing from tear gas fired at close range by the police into the back of a lorry.

Not only are the French security forces shooting people with riot control weapons at close range, almost all the tear gas casings the Dismalaid crew found were identified as out-of-date. Like other chemical products, tear gas expires, becoming dangerous for a number of reasons. For one, the mechanism that sets off the canister or grenade can become faulty. This can lead to injury for anyone handling them. It can also make the devices more likely to cause fires – especially when lodged into enclosed spaces like tents or lorries. This dangerous police behaviour can be deadly.

In addition, the chemical compound contained in expired weapons may no longer be approved according to the most recent safety tests and certificates. But perhaps most ominously, expired riot control casings are very difficult to trace back to the point of sale – allowing both weapons manufacturers and governments to evade blame.

One can imagine the thinking behind using out-of-date, potentially illegal weaponry on people with no legal status: has someone in a police station somewhere in Calais taken the decision to use up old stock on those with no right to complain? Perhaps they gambled no one will find out and, even if they did, that [no-one will care anyway](#). But more and more people are becoming sympathetic to the plight of the refugees perched on that small patch of land in the Port au Calais. And by using Riot , the crew in Calais were able to identify tear gas casing as products of French manufacturers [Alsetex](#), [Nobel Sport Securite](#) and [Verney-Carron](#), as well as -based [Combined Tactical Systems](#). These companies are industry leaders that export around the world – in the Port au Calais they're profiting from the repression of refugees.

[Riot](#) is a project from Omega Research Foundation, Bahrain Watch and Bournemouth University with Minute Works graphic design. The RiotID pocket guide is available to freely download in Arabic, English, French, German, Spanish and Turkish . [Dismalaid](#) is an impromptu anarcho-aid project run by recycled crew from Banksy's Dismaland.

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