

# SCIENCE NEWS®

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## Letters

### Not-so-benign force?

"Not-So-Deadly Force" (SN: 3/7/98, p. 156) made pretty depressing reading. The development of Third Reich technology for use in the suppression of unarmed and defenseless civilians guilty only of the crime of public dissent may, just may, be one of the reasons an alarming number of people have begun to despise "science" and "scientists."

*Edward H. Clark  
New Orleans, La.*

I was disappointed that your article claimed that a laser, designed to dazzle a person in broad daylight, is completely harmless. A dazzle laser may be less harmful than

### CORRECTION

"Red glimmer reveals most distant galaxy" (SN: 3/21/98, p. 182) states that a redshift of 5 stretches wavelengths of light by a factor of 5. The light is stretched by a factor of 6.

a bullet, but it can have a permanent, detrimental effect on a person's eyesight.

The damage may be painless, and you may not notice it after just one exposure, but it is permanent and cumulative. People who carelessly play with lasers sometimes don't realize that their eyesight is impaired until after many exposures, when they notice that they can no longer read small print or see fine details.

Instead of saying that the laser dazzler is harmless, you should have said—as you said of some of the other weapons described in the article—that it is substantially less harmful than other means of controlling a violent person.

*Jim Large  
Pittsburgh, Pa.*

Both the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the American National Standards Institute, a private, nonprofit organization that administers and coordinates the private sector's efforts toward voluntary standardization,

have developed eye safety standards related to lasers.

Richard J. Nelson of LE Systems, the manufacturer of the Laser Dazzler, says the device is designed to meet those eye safety standards by spreading the laser's output over a wide aperture. The radiated power in the resulting beam is below the ANSI standard for maximum permissible exposure, which itself has been set below known hazardous levels.

Nelson says the specifications and the performance of the Laser Dazzler have been, and will continue to be, reviewed by the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, and other independent sources to ensure that the device meets all federal standards for eye safety.  
—S. Perkins

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All letters subject to editing.

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**Cover:** In 2007, a spacecraft orbiting Mars will blast off on its return trip to Earth, carrying samples of rock and soil stored on the surface of the Red Planet by a previous mission. The ring-shaped device is the first stage of the craft's propulsion system.  
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