

DEFENSE SPRAYS

By Personal Safety Specialist Susan Bartelstone

Dear Safety Solutions:

Thinking about getting Mace or Pepper Spray for protection? Before you buy that canister, here are some tips.

A GOOD DEFENSIVE OPTION. Defense sprays have been around for over 25 years, primarily used by law enforcement and emergency service personnel. They're inexpensive, easy to carry (and conceal), and simple to use. When offered within the context of proper training and awareness, they make people feel safer and can be a real lifesaver!

LAWS AND REGULATIONS. The laws and regulations for the possession and use of defense sprays vary from state to state. Some require a training class or a license while others require nothing particular. Make sure to check with the police or the District Attorney's office for the requirements in your area.

In all 50 states, however, it's illegal to carry a defense spray onto an airplane and some airlines won't even permit them in checked baggage. If you're planning on taking yours with you, it's best to speak with each airline you'll be using before you fly.

PEPPER vs. MACE. Two types of defense sprays are available commercially: tear gas-based and red (cayenne) pepper-based solutions. Manufacturers of both types claim they'll disable attackers without causing any permanent injury or harm.



The effects of both types of spray last anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes and can be used successfully from a distance of up to 12 feet. The farther the distance you spray from, the better, since it minimizes having the spray back up on you. Most experts agree, however, that Pepper Spray takes effect quicker than Mace (usually within 2-5 seconds).

SAFETY TIP: *Don't develop a false sense of confidence or security because you're carrying a defense spray. Always use caution and common sense.*

10 TIPS FOR USING DEFENSE SPRAYS:

1. Carry your defense spray unobtrusively in your hand or pocket, ready to use. You don't want to fumble around in an emergency.
2. Use the important advantage of surprise. If confronted, never alert the assailant that you have a defense spray by holding it out in front of you. Extend your empty hand to delineate a boundary and yell loudly for the assailant to back off. If he continues to approach, spray immediately and without warning.
3. Aim first for the eyes and face then the clothes and upper torso so the fumes will linger.
4. Use the whole canister and make sure the spray has taken effect before you try to run away.
5. Ask about the nozzle on the spray you buy; different types have different advantages. Make sure the brand you purchase comes with instructions and a child-proof cap if you have kids.
6. Practice beforehand is critical so buy an extra canister to rehearse with (outdoors).
7. Replace the spray canister every year because it can lose pressure over time. Use the old one for target practice.
8. **IMPORTANT: both pepper and tear gas sprays have little effect on someone who is drunk, high on drugs, behaving erratically, or enraged.** In fact, they tend to make a person in those states very violent. If you have time, try to evaluate the

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attacker's mental state first before spraying. ALWAYS be prepared that they might not work as desired.

9. **IMPORTANT: neither pepper nor tear gas spray will necessarily cause an assailant to drop like a dead roach you've just sprayed with Raid.** The person may only be weakened but still standing, punching and/or moving around. A weakened attacker may give you a good opening for escape, however, so learn how to press that advantage.
10. Be prepared to take further defensive action in case the spray isn't as effective as you'd want.

SAFETY TIP. No absolutes exist in crime situations and no advice can address every variable. Analyze each scenario individually and only respond in the way that you instinctively judge best.

Got a safety concern? Send your questions to Dear Safety Solutions and Personal Safety Specialist Susan Bartelstone by going to www.dearsafetysolutions.com or e-mail solutions@fightsafe.com

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