

Where did Pepper Spray come from?

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Who could have thought half a century back that the pepper we use so extensively for seasoning and for making our food taste spicier and hot could one day be used as a weapon for self defense? Yet, here we are with an innovative self defense spray known as the pepper spray and it's a real tear jerker! Pepper as we all know, can make our eyes tear due to the spicy quality. So when this very quality of the spice was harnessed by modern day scientists to create a product that could potentially halt the stride of the miscreant, it was hailed as a very big achievement. Over a period of time, scientists further worked to capture this quality of pepper in a marketable form that was easy to use and store. Thus was born the pepper spray. In the modern times pepper spray is not just used by women world over for the purpose of self defense but, also for riot control, crowd control, and for providing defense against animals like dogs and bears. With so many varied and interesting uses, the history of pepper spray also makes for an interesting read. So if you want to know when the pepper spray actually came into existence, read on.

Pepper Spray History

By James D. Anderson

Although the use of pepper spray can't be dated back too long ago, but history reveals that red chili pepper was being used for self defense in ancient India and China. In ancient India, it was not as popular as it was in China. Chinese people and even warriors had their own innovative method of using this spice; and it included wrapping grounded cayenne in rice papers so that they could throw it at the faces of their enemies, opponents, or intruders. It was accepted as a weapon of choice for self defense because of its ability to incapacitate a person temporarily. A secret martial art society of people in ancient Japan called the Ninjas has been using grounded pepper for disabling their opponents for a long time. Historical evidence reveals that in the Tukagawa Empire era in Japan, the police used a weapon called the "metsubishi." Metsubishi was, basically, a box consisting of chili pepper and the police used to use this box for blowing hot pepper into the eyes of people who were found guilty of some crime. There is even historical evidence of the use of chilies in Mexico that dates back to 7000 BC. According to the evidence collected, Mexican Indians were cultivating peppers in 5500 BC. Some of the types of pepper grown during that time include chiltecpin, jalapeño, ancho, paprika, serrano, cayenne pepper, as well as bell pepper in different colors. The fact about whether they used these different peppers for self defense or as weapons of defense during those times is unknown. Some of the more recent examples of the use of pepper as a weapon can be dated back to the 14th and 15th century when slavery was rampant.

Chili pepper was used not only as a weapon of self defense but also for treating wounds and during torture. As a matter of fact, pepper became a popular method for torturing people, criminals, and slaves. It was only in the 1980's that pepper began being used as pepper spray and became a legalized non-lethal weapon. Law enforcement agencies also recognized pepper spray as a non-lethal weapon capable of incapacitating just about anyone. This was also the time when the postal workers started using pepper sprays against dogs and other pets.

Civilian Use Of Pepper Sprays Pepper spray is also known as oleoresin of capsicum (OC) spray and it was actually introduced not by the lawmakers but by the US Postal service in the 1980's. The FBI was able to endorse it as an official chemical agent only in 1987 and it took another 4 years before it could be legally accepted by the law enforcement agency. But when it comes to civilian use, not all brands or types of pepper sprays can be used. There are some states in the US and some countries as well that forbid the use of pepper sprays by civilians. For example: it is illegal to use pepper spray, mace or tear gas in Canada. In the US, there are two types of pepper sprays that can be used by civilians and they are CS (orthochlorobenzalmalonitrile) and CN (chloroacetophenone). There is a third type called the CR but it has not yet been recommended for civilian use. The fourth option is the standard pepper spray that has been made from an extract of chili peppers used for making oleoresin capsicum. The process basically ensures that the main ingredients, which cause irritation in the eyes is gained from the chili. OC or oleoresin capsicum is insoluble in water and is normally dispersed using aerosol cans. The pepper spray was actually imported from Canada to the US and it was being used in Canada by civilians as a bear repellent spray and not against human intruders. The modern day civilian pepper sprays are safe as well as legal weapons for self defense. Considered to be extremely effective, it has become quite handy for women the world over and they can use it to repel the actions of single or multiple attackers. It has worked wonders for civilians because when sprayed on the face of the attacker/s, it can cause intense pain for as long as 45 minutes including swelling and burning in the eyes.

For civilians, pepper spray is restricted in a few states in the US and they are:

New York: Civilians in New York can purchase defense sprays other than pepper sprays only from a licensed Firearms Dealers or any other licensed Pharmacist within the state.

Massachusetts: In Massachusetts, civilians can only purchase certain types of defense sprays from a licensed Firearms Dealer within the state.

Michigan: Partial ban on pepper spray. Civilians in this state can only use an OC Pepper spray that is not more than 2% concentrate.

Wisconsin: Pepper spray used by civilians should not be any stronger than 10% and the weight should not be more than 15-60 grams.

California: In California, civilians need to ensure that pepper spray canisters are less than 2.5 ounces.

Washington D.C.: Civilians in this state have to first register possession of pepper spray with their local law enforcement agencies before they can use them.