

# Examining common OC deployment errors

By Ron Martinelli

An increasing number of agencies are switching from teargas/mace (CN/CS gas), to oleoresin capsicum pepper spray (OC). However, many officers (and civilians) using OC, continue to experience problems using it on violent "goal-oriented" assailants.

When OC was initially introduced to law enforcement, it was touted by some manufacturers as a "magic bullet" that would incapacitate almost every resistive or violent subject. In the years following the advent of OC, officers have learned that while OC is an excellent option, it is not the answer in all use of force situations.

Analysis of incidents where OC was deployed and judged by officers to be "ineffective," has found that most of the "failures" officers attribute to OC, actually reflect a lack of understanding of the dynamics of this chemical agent.

During the last three years, I have researched hundreds of OC incidents, and have interviewed many subjects influenced by OC. I have also conducted training experiments using officer volunteers as "goal-oriented" assailants, pitted against officers spraying them with OC. In addition, I have also had the opportunity to deploy OC against numerous resistive and assaultive suspects in high-risk incidents.

As a result of my research, I have categorized some of the most common OC deployment errors in field and institution environments. Please review and memorize these errors, so that you can avoid them when deploying OC during your next critical incident(s).

**NO TACTICAL PLAN PRIOR TO DEPLOYMENT:** "Line up your ducks!" Always plan upon the unexpected BEFORE deploying any chemical agent like OC spray.

**SPRAYING TOO CLOSE TO THE SUBJECT:** A hand-held aerosol stream OC weapon needs at least three feet to allow for the oxygenation of the OC particles (capsinoids) to leave their water carrier envelope and effectively strike and influence the target. Spraying too close prevents this and delays the effects of OC. Spraying too close may also cause officer contamination by "blow-back."

**SPRAYING TOO LONG AND TOO MUCH OC ON THE SUBJECT:** The saying, "If a little works good, a lot must work great" does not apply to the deployment of OC. Remember that only 5-to-10 percent of your OC canister contains active OC. The remaining 90-to-95 percent is a combination of wa-

ter, glycol and a preservative. Therefore, the more OC liquid sprayed onto a subject, the more OC you are washing off!

You should never spray more than .5 - 1.5 seconds of OC onto a subject unless you have missed your target. Spraying 3-5-plus seconds of OC onto any subject may render your weapon **TOTALLY INEFFECTIVE** against the subject until the water in the solution evaporates.

**NOT MOVING WHILE SPRAYING (Allows the assailant to reach you.):** ALWAYS move laterally and side-step while deploying OC on an advancing target. Standing still while spraying allows the threat to remember where you are, and provides them with an opportunity to reach and assault you. This can occur even when the subject has already been successfully influenced. Remember, if they can touch you, they can hurt you!

**INACCURATE DEPLOYMENT MISSING YOUR TARGET:** The primary and ONLY target areas when deploying OC spray are the face, eyes, nose and mouth. Striking any other areas is **TOTALLY INEFFECTIVE**, or significantly delays any response.

**MOVING IN TOO SOON AND ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL AN INFLUENCED SUBJECT:** Just because you have successfully sprayed and influenced your subject **DOES NOT** mean that their resistance has stopped. Allow the OC to take effect and issue strong, loud and simple verbal commands, PRIOR to attempting to physically control any influenced subject.

**CROSS-CONTAMINATION OF SELF AND PARTNERS:** Remember to always project your weapons on your target(s). Never allow your weapon to be projected upon you and your partners. Be aware of **WIND DIRECTION** and your **ENVIRONMENT** prior to deploying any chemical agent.

**LACK OF TRAINING IN, OR NO OTHER FORCE OPTIONS CONSIDERED:** OC is NOT a "magic bullet", nor will it solve all your problems. OC will not make up for a lack of proficiency in other defensive force/control tactics.

Your hand-held aerosol OC canister is a **TACTICAL WEAPON**. This means you must thoroughly understand the dynamics of the weapon and must practice using it.

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