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## Pepper spray deaths

Sixteen criminal suspects have died in police custody after police used pepper spray in combination with the "hogtie" restraint procedure.

**Spray effects**

**When inhaled:** Membranes lining lungs swell, restrict breathing

- **Lasts 20 to 45 min.**
- **Burning, swelling of eyes**
- **Burning sensation on skin**
- **Inflames respiratory tract**

**Hogtie procedure**

**The danger:** Suspect's full weight rests on chest, compressing lungs; can cause suffocation

1. Officer handcuffs suspect
2. Suspect's ankles shackled
3. Ankles connected to handcuffs with elastic cord
4. Suspect is confined face down

SOURCES: Fraternal Order of Police, news reports

Knight Ridder/Tribune/JAMES SHALLWOOD

# Opponents seek study into pepper spray risk

• One document says 40 people in U.S. have died

BY SETH ROSENFELD
San Francisco Examiner

SAN FRANCISCO: A manufacturer of pepper spray says "little or nothing is known about the health risk or toxicity of pepper spray."

About 40 people nationwide are known to have died after being pepper-sprayed, according to a copy of a January research proposal by the Defense Technology Corporation of America that was released by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Although California Attorney General Dan Lungren promised mandatory safety studies when he authorized use of the spray in the state in 1992, the required research has not been done, the ACLU said in a study on health risks of pepper spray.

State Environmental Protection Agency officials have warned Lungren and his subordinates in the state Department of Justice for at least two years about their safety concerns about the spray, the study said.

"As far as I know, there is currently no adequate health risk assessment performed" for pepper spray, one state EPA scientist said in a January 1994 interoffice voice mail message that the ACLU obtained under the state public records act.

"There are serious health concerns," the unnamed scientist said.

State scientists have also warned that so little is known about residual effects of pepper spray that county coroners may not know what to look for when conducting autopsies.

The ACLU of Southern California released the report as it asked a federal safety agency to set national rules for the manufacture and use of pepper spray.

"We believe the Consumer Product Safety Commission should move as quickly as possible to take regulatory action in this area," said the ACLU's Allan Parachini in a June 16 letter to the commission. "Because of the health and safety risks involved in the use of pepper spray, national standards are essential."

Since January 1993 there have been at least 27 deaths in California in which police officers used pepper spray, according to the ACLU report.

Pepper spray, an extract of chili peppers, is intended to temporarily incapacitate aggressive subjects by burning skin and eyes and inflaming respiratory passages, making breathing painful and difficult.

Although pepper spray has not been cited as a direct cause of any death, the ACLU said evidence shows it may be a contributing factor in cases in which people are on drugs, have existing heart or lung problems or are tied in positions that inhibit breathing.

# POLICE

• New tactics include use of immobilizing foam

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can either talk the subject into cooperating, resort to their fists or fall back on their guns. There has got to be a better set of options."

The institute, affiliated with the U.S. Department of Justice, is working with the Department of Defense on options ranging from the ho-hum to the realm of *Star Trek*. The partnership between the two agencies is new but logical. The Cold War is over, and government defense labs are scrambling to find a fresh justification for existing.

Police say they welcome the help. About 150 officers are killed on duty each year in the United States, according to the justice Institute. Confrontations with police end in about 350 civilian deaths annually.

In 1994, the Justice and Defense departments signed an agreement to cooperate on the development of technologies that could have either law enforcement or military applications. Last fall Congress authorized almost $40 million for the joint effort, up from about $2 million in government money spent for development of such weapons in 1991.

Called variously "less-than-lethal," "nonlethal" and "limited-effects" weapons, the devices combine exotic and ordinary technologies — electromagnetic pulses, lasers, microwaves, even the lowly sound wave.

The inventions in progress basically come in two categories — those that will subdue a violent suspect, and those that will keep one from fleeing in a car.

One such invention would halt a car at the touch of a button.

Milton Finger, deputy associate director for defense technologies application programs at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories, said scientists are working on a device that would shut down a car by emitting an electromagnetic pulse to disable the vehicle's computer systems.

Another gizmo would launch a "sticky bullet" carrying a tracking tag that would allow police to monitor a vehicle's location.

Shutting a car down by remote control or tracking it from afar would eliminate the need for chases that often end in injury or death to suspects, police officers or bystanders.

A third method of halting vehicles, being tested by the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, updates an old idea: placing a spiked barrier on the road to disable a suspect's car. The improved device can be activated by remote control so police won't inadvertently shred the tires of vehicles driven by police or other citizens.

Another line of devices targets suspects who are violent, drugged or mentally ill, but unarmed.

Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, N.M., has been working on a gun that shoots a taffy-like resin at high pressure, miring the suspect in sticky goop.

The invention has one big shortcoming: cleanup. So far, the only substance that gets the goo off is baby oil.

Sandia also is investigating water-based foam for use in prisons. Once engulfed in the substance, people can't see or hear, though they still can breathe.

An even simpler concept is the net gun, brainchild of a firm outside Boston that invented the machines that stamp the "m" on M & M candies.

One weapon already in use is a beanbag launcher that shoots a small fabric sack filled with lead pellets. The projectile is designed to knock down and disable suspects while limiting injuries, said Michael Keith, president of MK Ballistic Systems in Holister, Calif., which manufactures the ammunition.

Police in Los Angeles, San Jose and Sacramento, Calif., and in Las Vegas have all purchased them. Beanbag bullets were invented 25 years ago to quell civil disturbances but were abandoned when the one company that made them went out of business.

Use of back-seat air bags to restrain prisoners also has gotten favorable reviews.

Allan Parachini, a spokesman for the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California who is on an advisory group reporting to the joint steering committee, said he thinks it could have prevented the death of someone like Aaron Williams, a San Francisco burglary suspect. Williams died in police custody earlier this month after being doused with pepper spray, handcuffed, shackled and placed alone in the back of a police wagon.

But other weapons, even the inventors acknowledge, are so far out they may never be more than a gleam in a scientist's eye.

# ANGRY

• 'They've completely confused good and bad'

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eyes filling with tears. "We should kill every one of them!"

Yelled another: "What do you mean 'free Grozny?' These people have just killed our families!"

As Bodenmowik's central square filled with freed hostages and their relatives, arguments, screaming matches and shrill soliloquies broke out from every direction.

Emotionally frayed by the days of waiting and wondering, consumed by hatred for the gunmen who had visited such misery on this city, people were in no mood to hear that the Chechens were not the bad guys.

But that was the message from most of the hostages interviewed here. Some spoke of their captors' kindness to children. Others noted the Chechens had given their own blood to help the wounded hostages. A few remarked on the Chechens' sobriety, decent manners and seriousness of purpose.

Nearly all of them seemed to have identified with their captors, especially in the aftermath of two violent attacks by Russian special forces on Saturday. Those attacks caused dozens of casualties among the hostages while failing to dislodge the Chechens from the hospital where they were holed up.

Indeed, many of the hostages were so frightened by the Russian attack that, certain they were going to die, they wrote their names on their forearms in ballpoint pen so that their corpses could be identified later.

"When the Russian army attacked, I saw one of the fighters wrap a little boy in his arms to protect him," said a 44-year-old housewife named Luba.

An indignant woman who was listening snapped back, "Have you become a Chechen yourself or what?"

Said Luba: "If you had been there yourself, you would understand. I'm not saying the Chechens are good."

Relatives of the hostages weaved through the thickening crowd in the town square, frantically seeking their loved ones, showing photographs of their husbands and sons and wives, hoping someone could provide some news.

When they found their relatives or spotted them descending from a bus, they screamed and cried. All around the square, people were hugging, rocking back and forth, repeating the names of their loved ones and stroking their hair. Couples walked off wiping the tears from each other's faces.

Yet in many cases it was only a matter of minutes before the joy of reunion gave way to confusion.

Boris Sharik, 16, was released yesterday and reunited with his mother. His father, however, was still held hostage and on his way south in a convoy of buses with the Chechens. When Boris told his mother that the Chechens had treated him well she unleashed a tirade at him. "What do you know?" she said contemptuously. "You're only 16."

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