

Police pepper spray adds sting

Old formula didn't always work

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Calgary police are spicing-up their arsenal by adding a more potent pepper spray canister to their belts because the old product fails to subdue aggressive subjects 30 per cent of the time.

Police found the regular spray has little effect on some people because they seem to have an altered sense of pain and are able to function despite being blasted -- usually those who are highly aggressive, drunk, mentally ill or high on drugs such as methamphetamine.

The new oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray is seven times more potent, made of oil taken from the placenta near the stem of the hottest cayenne peppers.

"Because of the number of subjects that are on (drugs) that affect their central nervous system . . . we think we could be getting better compliance," Sgt. Chris Butler, of the police skills and procedures unit, said of the reason for the new spray.

Drug addiction experts say many narcotics cause people to have a heightened reaction. Methamphetamine, for instance, is a stimulant.

"They are associated with side-effects with some people being more aggressive," said George McBride, counselling supervisor for Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission adult services. "The nature of the drug is that it does stimulate. It causes people to speed up."

Calgary police have used pepper spray since 1992, when it was rated 85 per cent successful for compliance. Now, "we're down to 70 per cent or less," said Butler.

In February, police responded to a robbery in McKenzie Towne and encountered a knife-wielding man high on meth.

Despite a hefty dose of pepper spray, the man refused to surrender or drop his weapon. As a last resort, police shot the man in the leg.

"The reality is, there will be some individuals who will fight through (pepper spray)," said Butler.



CREDIT: Mikael Kjellstrom, Calgary Herald
Calgary Const. Mark Beaven of the police skills and procedures unit shows the new, more potent, pepper spray that officers will use to subdue criminals, beginning next month.

Pepper spray is designed to cause temporary blindness, instant pain and shortness of breath.

For the past two months, police in the skills and procedures unit have tested the spray's effectiveness. The Sabre Red spray is a mixture of red pepper and ultraviolet dye.

"We're seeing positive effects," Butler said of the new product.

Use of Sabre Red will be fully implemented in the new year.

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