



Spray and Run Away

Pepper Spray Defense

By

Mark McGee

Defending With Pepper Spray

In the last Women's Self Defense newsletter I shared the defense method of 'Throw and Go.' If you didn't read that one, I highly recommend you check it out. In this newsletter I'd like to look at another self-defense technique for women.

Some of my women students have asked me to teach them how to use pepper spray against an attacker. I call the technique 'Spray and Run Away.'

Pepper spray is a good defensive weapon 'if' —

1. You choose the right type of spray
2. You know how to use it
3. You can get to it before your attacker gets to you
4. You don't let the attacker use your spray on you

Let's begin with how to choose the right type of pepper spray.

Your Choices

I've worked with four types of pepper spray —

- foam
- gel
- stream
- fog/mist

Each one has its pros and cons, so I usually train women with the type of spray they already purchased. If they asked me which type I'd suggest, I go through the list of pros and cons. Here's a Quick Look —

- Foam sprays work well at close range. The foam forms a 'ball' on contact and sticks to the attacker. It works inside and outside. While the attacker is trying to wipe it off their face, you can run away. The chance of the foam ball coming back on you when you spray is minimal.
- Gel spray also sticks to the attacker, making it difficult for them to wipe it off their face. Some people prefer

using gel pepper spray indoors, but I've trained with it outside as well. It also works better at a closer range.

- Stream sprays are what people usually think of when they hear the words 'pepper spray.' It works well inside or outside and has a longer spray range — some of them up to 20 feet. This is often the type of pepper spray women buy and like to use.
- Fog spray (also known as cone-mist spray) does just what the name implies — it shoots out a 'fog' of spray that can cover a larger area in case you're attacked by multiple attackers. One issue with fog spray is that the range is shorter and you may also come in contact with the 'fog.' That makes your running away a little more difficult if you're also dealing with pepper spray in your eyes. Try to be 'up-wind' from the spray if possible.

Many women like to use the key chain pepper spray because it's in their hands when they get out of their car or house or when they walk toward their car or house. They don't have to fumble through their purse to find it when attacked.

Some women like to use the ‘hand-held’ spray that fits nicely in their hand. Many are made to deliver a powerful response to an attack that includes a ‘color dye’ that makes it easier for law enforcement to identify your attacker.

Some women like to wear pepper spray ‘wrist bands’ when they jog because of its ease of availability. One of the recent Women’s Self Defense articles I wrote was about ‘safe jogging,’ so you may want to review that and consider how pepper spray would fit into your ‘defense plan.’

You can find pepper sprays for runners online or at local stores (e.g. Dick’s Sporting Goods, Walmart, Lowes). Even if you end up purchasing online, you may want to visit a local store and get a feel for how the different types of pepper spray work before ordering. You might also contact your police or sheriff’s department to see if they hold clinics about using pepper spray as a defensive weapon.

Another issue is safety. You don't want the pepper spray going off accidentally and hitting you or a friend. Check out the 'safety' features before buying. If you attend a clinic or training session taught by a professional, they'll be able to help you with how to use pepper spray properly.

Is Pepper Spray Legal?

Great question! A 'Pepper Spray Laws by State 2024' graphic shows that pepper spray is legal in 35 states and 'legal with restrictions' in 16 states. Some states require that pepper spray must be 'concealed.' Some states won't allow pepper spray brought into certain types of buildings. Most airlines won't allow it either. Best thing you can do is check out state and federal laws before purchasing and carrying.

I don't train young women under the age of 18 in how to use pepper spray because children are not allowed to possess it. Felons are also not allowed to be in possession of pepper spray. Keep in mind that pepper spray is a 'weapon.' It can be used for good or bad depending on who is using it and why.

Training to Use Pepper Spray

I don't recommend that women purchase pepper spray, then practice with it alone in their backyard. That's a good way to get spray in your eyes, on your clothes, or onto someone nearby who comes over to see what you're doing.

I suggest you begin with a pepper spray 'trainer' to learn how to use it. That's a pepper spray container similar to what you want to purchase, but filled with water instead of pepper spray. Especially with 'stream sprays' it gives you the feel of using the real thing without anyone getting hurt.

Using a 'trainer' spray with water also allows you to learn how to grip the container in your dominant hand while leaving your thumb free to press the button to 'spray.' It also allows you to practice two primary types of spraying —

1. Center line spraying
2. Side-to-side spraying

Center line spraying is where you extend the pepper spray container from your center toward the attacker's center. It's similar to how we train people to defend in martial arts. If your arms and hands extend from your center and you face your attacker's center, it's difficult for them to get around or past you. Another part of 'center spraying' is to spray high, then low, then high, then low. Again, another martial technique. Spraying someone in the face will often cause them to try and move away from you or go low to get under the spray. If you spray from the center in an 'up-and-down' motion, you will cover them with spray, foam, gel, or whatever type of spray you use. They will be covered with pepper spray, which gives you a great chance of running to safety.

Side-to-side spraying works when you have multiple attackers. You can spray all of them in the face, then change to center line spraying if one or more of them try to get to you. Cover them with spray as quickly as you can, turn, run and scream loudly while you run. Look to the side as you run and use your peripheral vision to see if any of the attackers are chasing you. You can use zig-zag running like we explained in the 'safe jogging' newsletter. If you have any pepper spray left and it's necessary, you can step to the side so the attacker doesn't tackle you while you spray them again in the face. Run away again and keep screaming.

What about your non-dominant hand? Use that hand to push your opponent away or keep them from grabbing and holding you. We teach a variety of hand and arm escape techniques in martial arts that can make it very difficult for an attacker to grab and hold on to you. If the attacker does try to grab your dominant hand with the sprayer, use your other hand to poke them in the eyes or strike their throat. Also use your feet to kick them in the shin, knee, or 'where it hurts' to move them farther from you. That should then allow you to use the pepper spray to finish the job of self defense.

Spray Range

Once you purchase the container of pepper spray you're going to carry (and you've done some training with a water trainer), it's time to try it outside (unless it's a windy day). Practicing with your pepper spray will show you its 'range' capabilities. If you can afford to buy two containers, you can use one to train with and one to carry for real use. Know how far the spray will go. Use a solid wood fence, large board, or tree to see how it works. It's good to have a spray container that has a range of at least ten feet. Some have 25 feet, which is even better. However, know that the longer range pepper sprays may run through spray faster than ones with less range. Just something to consider when purchasing.

Can't See - Can't Breathe - Can't Fight

We have a saying in martial arts and self defense that 'if your attacker can't see and can't breathe, they can't fight.' That's why strikes to the eyes, throat, and groin are so effective in hand-to-hand defense. It's the same thing using pepper spray. If you use the spray correctly, your attacker(s) will struggle to see and breathe. That means they can't attack you for a few seconds. That's usually enough time for you to run for your life — literally.

Where to Buy?

Here are ten examples of various types of pepper spray you can purchase and where to get them. [I do not receive compensation for mentioning any of these products.]

1. [Sabre Pepper Gel](#)
2. [Mace Pepper Spray plus Water Trainer](#)
3. [Eliminator™ Blue Heat Keychain Pepper Spray w/ Marking Dye](#)
4. [Sabre Runner's Pepper Gel Spray](#)
5. [UDAP Pepper Power Jogger Fogger OC Compact Self Defense Pepper Spray](#)
6. [Eliminator™ 3-In-1 Hard Case Jogger Pepper Spray](#)
7. [Mace Brand Pepper Mace Defense Spray- Jogger Model](#)
8. [POM Pepper Spray Flip Top Pocket Clip](#)
9. [Vexor Pepper Spray Full Axis with Belt Clip for Self Defense](#)
10. [Police Magnum Keychain Pepper Spray Flip Top Safety 3 Pack](#)

You can be attacked anywhere, at anytime, by anyone. Be ready.



Sensei Mark McGee

Copyright © 1990-2024, Sensei McGee and Grace Martial Arts