Using a Defense Spray:

The use of a chemical based defensive spray has been, and remains to be, a very popular tool in the self-defense tool box of folks across the planet. Just like any tool, to use it effectively, you first need to understand why it does what it does and second how to deploy it under adversarial conditions.

The majority of defensive sprays are a pressurized mixture of a naturally occurring, plant based chemical called Oleoresin Capsicum also referred to as “OC.” The unit that contains the OC is available in many different sizes and configurations but, for the most part, all operate in the same manner. A trigger or push-button is activated releasing the spray, which is under pressure, from the unit. The two most common configurations have the OC spray being released in either a stream or as a fog.

OC is created by extracting derivatives from hot red chilies. It is these derivatives that cause the desired effect when sprayed against an attacker. The effects of the OC will differ from person to person and can range from incapacitating results to little if any effect. The majority of the population will trend towards incapacitation but just like any other less-than-lethal device there are persons that it will have no effect on. When introduced into a person’s mucous membranes, eyes, and skin it will cause a painful burning sensation, eyes to swell shut, and impaired breathing. All of these effects are temporary and usually will dissipate in 20-45 minutes depending on the person and the effective deployment of the spray.

To properly deploy the OC against an attacker you first need to know which kind you have. The two most common are “Stream” spray and “Fog.” The stream produces a solid shot of OC spray meant to be directed at the face of your attacker. Most units allow for multiple shots each lasting a few seconds. The stream allows you to introduce the OC chemical directly into the attacker’s facial area from a distance. The fog spray creates a cloud of OC that presents a barrier between you and the attacker. A fog application will also leave the unit under pressure giving it forward velocity that may envelop the attacker. Each type has their good and bad points; the stream will give you the ability to reach the threat from a short distance but will not create that barrier, the fog also will reach the threat and will create that barrier, but if there is wind will not be as effective.

As with any tool there are numerous ways to put it into action. The technique that I teach at Front Strike Self-Defense is to take the OC unit in your strong hand and push it out in front of you. Position your off (weak) hand with your palm facing towards you (back of your hand facing out) approximately 6 inches from your face just below your eyes. Depress the spray button making sure that the nozzle is facing your attacker. Keep your off hand in position to deflect away from your eyes and nose any residual or blow-back spray. Spray for two-three seconds, release the trigger, and then move. Do not stand in the same position you just sprayed from, your attacker may get a full dose, close their eyes, and just charge forward blindly.

By moving you also get out of the way of residual spray, especially if using a fogger. Once you move assess your situation, if you can safely remove yourself from the threat by leaving the area, do it. If you have to administer another dose of the OC repeat the steps you just took.

It should be noted that beyond the aerosol type spray, there are other options available on the market. Though more expensive the pepper gel and foam sprays offer the ability to deploy the OC product in a gel or foam configuration that will adhere to the threat and can be difficult for them to remove immediately. Many products also have a UV or “Marker” dye in the UC which will allow law enforcement to identify the person sprayed for several hours after the confrontation.

Defensive sprays are a less-than-lethal tool available for self-defense use. It is important to always remember that they are just a tool and as such are prone to failure or reduced and diminished effects in an attacker. Always have a plan B! Think about what you are going to do if the spray does not have the desired effect. As a user of defensive spray you also need to think about how you are going to react should you become exposed to the OC yourself. Practice presenting and using the spray (inert units can be purchased for training). As with any tool just having it is not enough, learn how it works and how to use it. Remember just because you go out and buy a stethoscope does not make you a doctor. Be smart, be alert, and be safe. REFUSE TO BE A VICTIM!

