

Introduction of "OC Spray to the Police Service Dog

Introduction of "Oleoresin Capsicum" Spray to the Police Service Dog Ensuring a Positive Learning Experience (1997)

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Introduction

Since OLEORESIN CAPSICUM ("OC") spray now enjoys almost universal use in the Police community in North America, much has been written about how successfully Police Service Dogs can work through the "OC" environment. Studies and testing have shown that Police Dogs can overcome the spray to make apprehensions and locate suspects in that environment. Additionally, they have even proven to be successful in doing more sensitive nose work, such as narcotics and explosives detection in and after "OC" exposure.

Now the question of how we introduce our dogs to work in the "OC" environment is much more common. For many of us, who have used our dogs over the years in the "CN" and "CS" gas environment, particularly if we work closely with our tactical teams, rather than just throwing our dogs into that environment, we usually did some exposure work to ensure our dog could handle the exposure to the gas and work through it. In exposing our dogs to "OC" there are a few more points to consider; both the visual stimuli of the sprayer and the actual negative physiological effect the dog must overcome. Really, in exposing your dog to "OC" spray, the most important things are not what to do, but what not to do.

Rules for OC Spray Training

- a. **DO NOT TRAIN TO FAIL** Prior to beginning each exercise be sure that through planning and preparation you have stacked the cards in your favour and are sure of successful results. Further the handler, quarry (helper) must each be fully briefed on what to do to bring the exercise back to a successful conclusion if the dog demonstrates any apprehension at each stage of the exercise. Remember, behaviour is never static. Your dog will either leave the field feeling stronger after an exercise or weaker. It is our job as Trainers to ensure the positive.
- b. **REMEMBER, THIS IS TRAINING, NOT TESTING!** What's the difference? Well in training we run exercises in which we ensure conditioning and success must be guaranteed, so that the rewards and other positive stimulus can be applied, and the conditioning continuum completed. Testing is that old method of let's run this and see what happens. That is not acceptable in training, especially in this

type of work, where you are trying build a dog's tolerance of an unnatural environmental condition. Remember, it is much easier to prevent a problem than to fix one once it has become part of the memory.

- c. **PATIENCE, PATIENCE, PATIENCE** Although this is a simple rule, it's probably the one that will be hardest for us to follow. We have a tendency to want to have accomplished something yesterday. It may be very true that all this could be accomplished in one day. Breaking it up into five or six short sessions over few weeks will guarantee success.

If we keep these rules in mind as we are planning how we are going to expose our dogs to "OC" spray, it will ensure our success. The following is just one example of a progressive plan to expose a trained Police Service Dog to "OC" spray.

Progressive Training Plan

Prerequisites: The Canine Team has previously been exposed to white smoke, having done both apprehension and search work in a white smoke environment. The Team can do both search, apprehension and control work with the handler wearing a gas mask. Additionally, the dog should have experience apprehending a suspect wearing a gas mask, and we must ensure that we do not condition the dog to believe that only good guys wear gas masks. This became critically obvious in a tactical incident in San Diego where the suspect emerged from the residence in the same camouflage and gas mask as the Tactical Team was wearing.

Day #1 Exercise #1 (Inert "OC" Spray)

Chase and Apprehension - dog aroused by quarry, dog sent to apprehend, quarry is armed with inert OC sprayer. As dog moves in or prior to being sent in, is sprayed with inert OC. Quarry is instructed to be alert for any signs of apprehension by dog and increase agitation if necessary to have dog successfully complete exercise. This exercise should be run two or three times and perhaps with handler protection. Quarry may increase amount of inert OC with each exercise. Ensure last exercise is very positive with a slip sleeve and lots of positive reward. This exercise will ensure that the dog has little or no apprehension to the visual presentation of the OC sprayer. This is the same reason that prior to this the dog has been introduced to white smoke, so the visual presentation is not perceived as a threat. In the same line of thought is if dog has trouble in later training perhaps due to handler, quarry or trainer error, going back to this exercise with the inert OC will help build the dog back up after an accidental failure.

Exercise #2 (1st Exposure "OC" Spray)

Chase & Apprehension same as exercise #1, using a fogger rather than a stream, let the dog run through the "OC" about 3 or 5 yards before the bite, so if the quarry detects any hesitation in the dog he can increase the agitation and bring it to a successful conclusion. Exercise should include a good strong fight with dog on sleeve, then a sleeve slip and lots of praise.

**If in Exercise #2 dog shows any significant hesitation or apprehension, repeat Exercise #1, no further exposure that date. If dog exhibits no problem, complete exercise #3.

Exercise #3 (2nd Exposure)

Same as Exercise #2, however a slightly stronger concentration. If no problems exhibited strong fight on sleeve and dog called out. Then re bite on command, strong fight on sleeve, then slip and praise.

** Decontamination - whether you choose to decontaminate the dog after each exposure or at the end of the day, depending on level of contamination. Once again you must do your best to ensure this is a positive experience. For example if your dog hates being sprayed by a hose, and immediately after the dog completes one of these exercises, you drag him over to the hose and blast him, he will not be real positive about the experience for next time. Simply try and be positive and reassuring.

Day #2 Exercise #4 (direct exposure)

Chase and Apprehension same as exercise #3, however this time a direct burst is applied to the dog while on the sleeve. The quarry will ensure that the bite is maintained throughout a 1 or 2 second burst. Then a strong fight and sleeve slip completes this exercise. ** if no problem, move to exercise #5, hesitation repeat exercise #1.

Exercise #5

Similar to an introductory building search exercise, for those who use bite reward. Dog is aroused by a quarry who runs into a small building, there is a medium exposure of OC in the building. The dog from the chase enters and quickly locates and bites quarry, for those who "bark and hold", upon being located the quarry must take flight or other action to cause the bite. Once again exercise ends with strong fight on sleeve then a slip.

Exercise #6

Immediately the dog is taken out of exercise #5 and after the appropriate warning, dog sent right back in for a simple blind building search. Again a strong fight and sleeve slip.

Day #3 Exercise #7

Repeat Exercise #3 (hidden sleeve if possible) with stronger concentration of spray, followed by clean out, handler protection with a direct exposure while on sleeve and hand contact to facial area, followed again by clean out. Praise.

Exercise # 8

Repeat Exercise #6 with slightly more difficult search exercise, lots of praise.

Now you should be comfortable to expose the dog to the OC environment he will be required to work in. Talk to your tactical teams and go over possible scenarios that will occur in operations. Ensure that your dog is also exposed to the people who will be involved in the deployment, as well as some of the other methods of delivery for the OC spray (i.e. sprayer, fogger, muzzle blast, grenade etc.) .

REMEMBER this is exposure training, it's not something you need or should be doing with your dogs every day or even on a regular basis. Its sole purpose is to give both Handler and Dog confidence when confronted with this environment on the street.



Robert James Wright has been with the Niagara Regional Police Service for 20 years, and presently holds the rank of Superintendent. Bob has an undergraduate degree from Brock University and a Diploma in Police Management from Western University. Superintendent Wright is a frequent instructor at seminars throughout North America including the International K9 Conferences.