

# Protesting Safety

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## 1. Executive Summary

This paper will outline some of the risks of protesting when it turns violent and ways to mitigate that risk. I have no political agenda. I just don't want any more people to get hurt.

I retired from the National Guard as a Sergeant First Class after 20 years in 2014. Part of the National Guard's mission is riot control, which we practiced at least once per year. My infantry unit worked in a prison during one combat deployment and we received specialized training in riot control, less than lethal weapons and chemical agents. I have been handcuffed, manhandled, sprayed with pepper spray, hit with tear gas and attacked with batons.

THE ONLY SAFE WAY TO PROTEST IS TO STAY HOME.. This may not be the answer you want to hear, but it's the truth. In my experience, the sense of anonymity and freedom from consequences during a protest brings out an evil that lies just below the surface of our civility.

Understand that a protest is one sociopath away from a riot. There may be people in the crowd who are just there because they know they can hurt other people with no consequences. Always remember about 1% of the population are sociopaths. These are people who have no empathy who can hurt others with no psychological consequences. Keep that in mind when evaluating whether you want to go to a protest.

## 2. When protesting gets violent

Many of us living in America today have never experienced violence. We've never thrown a punch, taken a punch, been traumatically injured or been put in a life-threatening situation. The consequences of protesting may have short-term and long term life-changing consequences.

### 2.1. What happens when the police clear an area

#### 2.1.1. The skirmish line

Try to stay in the back of a protest and avoid the police "skirmish line." This is the main line of police that stretches across the street and is the absolute worst place to be. You risk being crushed

between the police and other protesters. Try to leave before the panic starts, or stay to the back of the protest and keep escape routes in mind while protesting.

If you find yourself caught between the police and other protestors, try to face the police while backing away. This is dangerous because there will probably be debris on the ground that you can trip over, but the last thing you want to do now is turn your back.

For centuries, most slaughters happened when an army breaks, panics, and turns their back to their attackers. This feeling of bloodlust is primal and it's how most people get hurt.

Men who would feel guilty if they hit someone who was facing them will suddenly lose all compunction hitting an anonymous person who has their back turned.

**DO NOT PUT YOURSELF AT THE FRONT OF THE SKIRMISH LINE.**

Know your exits. Before you go to a protest, make a plan of how to get out of an area. If you are there with friends, agree on a meet-up point in case you get separated. **DO NOT RELY ON YOUR PHONE.** Your phone may be damaged or you may be low on battery or unable to get a signal. Have a plan to get out of danger before you put yourself in danger.

#### 2.1.2. Falling

Try not to fall on the ground. There is far more force behind a kick than a punch. Kicks are also “separated” from the consequences of the kicker. If you fall, a police officer may kick you as they step over you, especially if they know they can do this and make it look like an accident. Don't fall on the ground.

#### 2.1.3. Weapons you will encounter

You will encounter five basic types of less than lethal devices: noisemakers, chemical agents, Tasers, less than lethal ammunition

and batons. You will most likely encounter one kind of lethal weapon - most likely a police rifle that fires live ammunition.

#### 2.1.3.1. Noisemakers or “flash-bangs”

Noisemakers are designed to produce a loud sound and flash. They are often referred to as “flash-bangs.” They are basically a loud firecracker and about as dangerous. If you see one, don’t touch it. They have a short fuse and you don’t want one exploding in your hand.

The sound of a flash-bang will be about 175 decibels. This is louder than a jet engine. You will experience temporary hearing loss. The noisemaker will also disrupt the fluid in your inner ear, causing you to lose balance, making it harder to walk or run and increasing your chances of falling and being kicked.

The good news is that flashbangs are relatively lightweight and can’t be thrown very far. They are intended to be thrown between the police and the crowd to get the crowd to move away. Unfortunately, you might see some land in the crowd, which is why you ALWAYS STAY AWAY FROM THE SKIRMISH LINE.

#### 2.1.3.2. Chemical agents

Chemical agents are designed to create discomfort in order to produce compliance. There are basically two types of agents that are employed by police: CS gas, also known as “tear gas” and pepper or “OC” spray. Each work by the same principle of irritating mucus membranes, but they work in different ways and are designed for different purposes.

Note that there are various “home remedies” for dealing with tear gas and pepper spray. None of them really work. You will see protestors carrying milk, water or baking soda. These remedies might make you feel better, but in reality the only thing that neutralizes agents is time. The time you

spend attempting to “neutralize” an agent is time you could have spent getting out of the area

#### 2.1.3.2.1. CS or “Tear gas”

Tear gas is a chemical agent that is usually launched from canisters or thrown as grenades. DO NOT PICK UP AND THROW BACK CANISTERS. THEY MAY BE HOT either from the propellant charge or the exothermic reaction of the gas propellant. DO NOT PUT TRAFFIC CONES OVER CS GAS. If the police are firing gas, it is because they want you to LEAVE and it means they are coming up the street toward you. The time you spend trying to cover up a gas canister is time you could have spent leaving.

The effects of CS gas will vary depending on the severity and duration of exposure. Expect to have a very violent reaction: watery eyes, coughing, vomiting and a runny nose as your body tries to get the chemical out of its system. If you inhale CS gas, it will feel like you are breathing needles, but there shouldn't be any permanent damage.

If you have acne on your face or body, you will feel the effects of the gas there. It's normal and it will go away with time.

LEAVING THE AREA IS ALWAYS BEST CHOICE. You will feel better in a few minutes to about an hour, depending on exposure.

#### 2.1.3.2.2. Pepper Spray, also known as “OC Spray” is usually deployed in two forms - aerosol and pepper ball. Pepper spray is made from grinding chili peppers and extracting the resin. This resin is usually delivered with a liquid propellant that irritates mucous membranes in a similar fashion to CS Gas. Although the respiratory effects are not as bad as CS gas, the

effects to mucus membranes such as eyes and nose, are exceptionally painful. You will see home remedies for pepper spray, such as pouring water into the eyes. This will only work for as long as the water is being poured. As soon as the source of water is removed, the pain will resume. **DO NOT WASTE TIME POURING WATER INTO YOUR EYES.** If you are being sprayed, it is because the police want you to **LEAVE.**

The pain will subside within 45-90 minutes, but you will feel the effects of the pepper when you shower and residue from your hair and forehead flows into your eyes with the water. This is normal and it won't hurt as bad as the first time.

Note: If you are exposed to pepper, **DO NOT ENGAGE IN SEXUAL CONTACT** with yourself or others for at least 24 hours after your shower. The genitals are a mucus membrane.

#### 2.1.3.2.2.1. Liquid / Aerosol

This is the most common delivery method of pepper spray. It will be shot from a small self-defense canister or a larger crowd-control canister. Maximum range of a liquid/aerosol spray will be about 10 feet. Note that any police who are deploying pepper spray have been pepper sprayed in training. They have learned how to fight through the pain and still detain a suspect. They know what to expect if they are hit, **YOU DON'T.** They will still be effective if the spray blows back at them. Your best choice is to **LEAVE THE AREA.**

#### 2.1.3.2.2.2. Pepper balls are delivered from a gun-like launcher. Usually, these guns will be colored yellow or orange, or have some kind of

marking indicating that they are less-than-lethal ranged weapons.

The maximum effective range of a pepper ball at a point target is about 50 yards, although pepper balls can travel a little over 100 yards. Most police officers are trained to fire at the ground, instead of directly at a protester, but in the heat of the moment, police tend to fall back on their base training and they will shoot at the center mass of their target.

Pepper balls travel at roughly one fourth to one half the speed of a bullet. They will leave a bruise if they hit you in the body. They will permanently blind you if you are hit in the eye. If you are hit in the head, the balls will probably break the skin and you will bleed, but they won't penetrate the skull. The injury will look worse than it actually is, but you will probably need stitches. LEAVE THE AREA and seek medical attention.

If you are hit with a pepper ball, it will feel like you got hit with a baseball bat or a very bad bee sting. LEAVE THE AREA.

#### 2.1.3.3. Less than lethal ammunition or “rubber bullets”

Less than lethal ammunition is normally fired out of specialized launchers. These launchers will normally be standard police 12-gauge shotguns that are painted orange to indicate their special status, although standard lethal shotguns can also be used to fire less than lethal rounds.

Less than lethal rounds will hurt when they hit you. They are designed to cause pain and bring about compliance. If you are hit with a less than lethal round, it will cause bruising, but there should not be any permanent damage. Much like the

pepper rounds, getting hit will feel like you got hit with a baseball bat or a very bad bee sting. LEAVE THE AREA.

ALL LESS THAN LETHAL ROUNDS CAN KILL AT SHORT RANGE. If you see police deploying orange less than lethal weapons, LEAVE THE AREA.

#### 2.1.3.3.1. Rubber buckshot

These rounds are area effect weapons designed to impart pain compliance and psychological effects. The buckshot round will be composed of many small rubber pellets that spread out in a cone roughly 1 inch for every yard they travel. Since the buckshot is so light, it will slow down very quickly once it leaves the barrel. It's maximum range is about 20-30 yards. This weapon can kill at close range.

#### 2.1.3.3.2. Beanbag rounds

Beanbag rounds are buckshot rounds that have been sewn into a cloth package. These rounds tend to be fired directly at point targets - usually agitators who need to be stunned in order to be arrested. If police are deploying beanbag rounds, they are most likely shooting at a specific target in the crowd who is the source of trouble. These rounds can kill at close range.

#### 2.1.3.4. "Tasers," stun guns and electroshock weapons

"Taser" is the brand name of a type of electroshock or "stun gun" weapon. Tasers fire two darts that are connected to the launcher by a copper wire. The launcher then delivers a powerful electric shock through the target's body which causes involuntary muscular contractions.

In a crowd-control environment, Tasers will probably not be

used since they are one-shot devices with a cartridge that must be reloaded after each use. However, if you are arrested and not complying with the instructions of the officer, a Taser may be used on you. It will be painful, but the greatest danger will be hurting yourself from the fall when your muscles contract. The best way to avoid being hurt is to LEAVE THE AREA or COMPLY with instructions while you are being arrested.

#### 2.1.3.5. Batons

Most batons are made of wood, although some are made of plastic or metal. Batons will hurt, regardless of the material. Batons are probably the most dangerous weapon you will encounter during a violent protest because of the primal nature of the weapon.

Police are trained in many baton techniques, but in the heat of a violent protest, people will tend to regress to very primal instincts. Batons are normally intended to be “poking” weapons as opposed to swinging weapons, but the danger occurs when protesters are caught between the police skirmish line and other protesters who may not know what is going on. The protestors who are caught in the middle will be poked at first. But since you are caught between the police and other protestors, the police will view your lack of movement as noncompliance and you will be hit. The batons will cause bruising and possibly broken bones, especially to the hand and wrist as you attempt to reflexively shield your face.

LEAVE THE AREA BEFORE THIS HAPPENS.

#### 2.1.3.6. Live ammunition

This is the nightmare scenario. This will most likely happen in one of two ways: Panic fire and direct fire.

#### 2.1.3.6.1. Direct fire

This is most likely to occur from police who are carrying rifles. Riot control police who are carrying batons and shields won't drop them to go to a lethal force option, but sharpshooters who are embedded slightly behind the skirmish line will be the most likely sources of fire. The sharpshooter will probably have an M4/M-16 type rifle that fires 5.56mm rifle ammunition. Under most circumstances, there is nothing you can do to mitigate the threat from this weapon. The best defense is LEAVE THE AREA before a protest becomes violent.

The danger here is not necessarily from direct fire - the rifle fire will be accurate and directed at one specific threat. Rather, the danger will be from the extreme panic in the crowd of protestors.

Rifle fire cannot be mistaken for anything else. You will hear a rapid "POP POP POP.". If you are in the middle of the crowd, you are at risk of getting trampled. At the very least, you are risking scrapes and bruises from falling.

LEAVE THE AREA BEFORE THIS HAPPENS.

#### 2.1.3.6.2. Panic fire

This is less likely to happen, but far more devastating. In this case, one officer's direct fire causes another officer to fire his rifle out of panic.

The good news is that the panic fire will probably only last 3-10 seconds or roughly the time it takes to finish the magazine of rifle ammunition. By that time, the officer who is panicking will be forced to change magazines. This magazine change is a finer motor skill than pulling a trigger so at this point, he will be so

panicked, that he will probably have a hard time reloading. He will either stop his actions, or a supervisor will stop him from reloading. You can escape when the shooting stops.

If you hear the POP POP POP of rifle fire, get down on the ground immediately. This reduces the exposed area of your body by 75%.

Avoid walls. Bullets have a tendency to ricochet off of a wall and follow the wall. Avoid getting up and seeking direct cover. Odds are that this is not a sustained barrage of fire where you need to enter cover. Get down and wait for it to be over. LEAVE THE AREA when it is over.

#### 2.1.3.6.3. What to do if you get shot

Getting shot is a different experience for everybody. You are most likely to feel like you were hit with a baseball bat, followed either by numbness, heat or extreme pain.

GETTING SHOT DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU WILL DIE.

You will not die immediately unless you are hit in very specific places: certain areas of the brain, the spine or the heart. Police are trained to shoot until the threat is stopped. If you are still alive, odds are you weren't the intended target. Despite what you see in movies and TV, it is actually extremely hard to shoot someone and the human body is very resilient.

This is not a remote combat zone. If you are protesting in a large city, you are probably only a few minutes away from a hospital. The most important thing now is DON'T GIVE UP THE WILL TO LIVE. People can die from minor injuries if they give up.

DO NOT GIVE UP THE WILL TO LIVE.

Immediately apply direct pressure to the wound. If you are hit in an extremity, use a belt to create a tourniquet. Place the tourniquet two inches above the entry wound or above any broken bones that are sticking through the skin. SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION.

Do not place a tourniquet around the neck.

## 2.2. What to expect when you are arrested

### 2.2.1. The arrest process

At this point, you are most likely being arrested with tens or possibly hundreds of other people which will be overwhelming to the police. You will be placed in handcuffs or plastic flexi-cuffs. Odds are you will be forced to sit on the ground with no access to food, water, medication or a bathroom until you are transported to jail. This is not necessarily intentional cruelty, this is most likely a result of the police being totally overwhelmed.

Stay quiet, be respectful and follow all instructions from officers. NOBODY HAS EVER TALKED THEIR WAY OUT OF BEING ARRESTED, BUT PLENTY OF PEOPLE HAVE TALKED THEIR WAY INTO ADDITIONAL CHARGES.

You will most likely face a misdemeanor disorderly conduct charge which will have very limited effect on your life or future employment. Your actions from now on will determine what charges get added on. The things you say and do now will have consequences FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

You will be taken to jail and searched in very invasive ways. If you stay calm and follow instructions you will probably be released within 8-12 hours with a court date. Stay calm. Do as you are told.

Now your job is to stay quiet and fight this in court.

### 2.2.2. Tips if you are arrested

Your cell phone will be confiscated. Write down important contacts, including a lawyer, on paper or in a Sharpie marker on your body. Do not write on your hands, the ink will rub off from washing.

Bail is a deposit made in cash to assure that you will return for a court date. Some states have cash bail, others use a computer program algorithm to determine your level of risk. If you live in a state with cash bail, make sure a relative has access to at least \$500-\$1,000 in cash before attending a protest.

**DON'T BRING LARGE SUMS OF CASH WITH YOU.** Normally, you cannot bail yourself out of jail and you are just risking that cash being stolen during the arrest process.

Don't bring illegal drugs or anything that can be considered a weapon with you to protest. If you do have illegal drugs on you, inform the arresting officer. If the drugs are found on you by the jail staff, you will face additional charges. This includes marijuana, even if it is legal in your state.

## 3. The role of the National Guard

If you have a choice between protesting in front of police or protesting in front of the National Guard, choose to **PROTEST IN FRONT OF THE NATIONAL GUARD.**

National Guard soldiers are mostly drawn from the local community. Most of them had to leave their homes and jobs. They are receiving less pay than they would normally earn at their civilian jobs and are suffering a major life interruption. Most of them probably do not want to be there and they have no desire for violence.

However, soldiers tend to do their duty, no matter how distasteful that duty may sound. As long as the orders given to them are lawful, they will follow those orders. Do not expect a crisis of conscience in a National Guard soldier if he is

told to disperse a protest. However, if a National Guard commander is asked by the police to do something unlawful, they will probably refuse that order or delay the order to seek higher clarification.

THE NATIONAL GUARD IS MORE LIKELY TO BE ON YOUR SIDE.

National Guard soldiers do not have the power of arrest, but they can detain you so that the police can arrest you.

In order to use a weapon in the National Guard, you need to qualify on that weapon. Unless the soldier is part of the Military Police, odds are that he hasn't qualified on less than lethal weapons or pepper spray. His primary weapon will be a baton that he will use for poking instead of hitting. There may be police mixed in with them who do have pepper spray.

The National Guard will have more discipline than police. About 25% of these soldiers have been to Iraq or Afghanistan and they will be disciplined, even if items are being thrown at them and even if they are under direct small arms fire.

Do not mistake the National Guard of today for the untrained soldiers of protests during the Vietnam era. Today's National Guard soldiers are professional and lethal, but they will show far more restraint and professionalism than the police.

There may be some National Guard soldiers who are armed with the standard M4 or M-16 and probably one magazine of ammunition. They will not shoot looters, but if you attack them, they will shoot to stop the threat.

The odds of the National Guard shooting violent protestors is extremely low, but if they come under direct fire, they will end the threat with a level of speed and violence that you will not be able to comprehend.

If the situation feels like it is turning bad, LEAVE THE AREA.

#### 4. How to dress

If you are going to protest, wear long pants, a long sleeved shirt and close-toed shoes. Do not wear tank tops, shorts, flip flops or sandals. This will not stop bullets, but it will allow you to run and help protect against scrapes if you fall.

It is best to dress “grey man.” This doesn’t mean “all gray.” Rather, it means you are dressed in a way that doesn’t particularly stand out. Don’t wear bright colors or logos - nothing that will draw your attention or allow you to be used as a target.

Also note that criminals have not declared a pause in their activities. Criminals may target people attending the protest because the target is most likely in an unfamiliar place, they are focused on the event, they are unconcerned for their personal safety, and they may have cash and valuables.

**YOU MAY COME UNDER ATTACK BY CRIMINALS WHO ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION.**

## 5. Medical, injuries and what to pack

If you wish to attend a protest as medical personal, here is what you need to know:

### 5.1. Supplies and general advice

Pack a lot of gauze and Kerlix. You will mainly encounter abrasions from falling, people touching tear gas canisters and head wounds from errant pepper balls. Do not bring tampons in lieu of Kerlix. This is an urban legend and will kill your patient. Heavy flow is not massive hemorrhage

Standard first aid kit stuff is fine: gloves, mask, tweezers. As it gets hotter, bring suntan lotion. Keep an eye on people who are overheating. People who have been sedentary for two months due to COVID are now marching in the heat and they will exhaust themselves. If possible, erect a clearly marked aid station and stock it with water and a treatment area.

Unless you are dealing with very minor injuries like splinters or minor cuts, your job is to treat the patient and send them to the hospital or urgent care.

Draw a map of the closest medical centers and keep it taped to the wall of your first aid tent. Make sure every medic and stretcher-bearer knows the route to the hospital on foot and can do it without holding a GPS.

Most people move at roughly 2.5 - 3 miles per hour in a fast walk, so make sure the times by foot to each hospital are marked on the map.

You may be tempted to bring fancy trauma stuff like stop-clot or tourniquets. You won't need a lot of these items - maybe just one or two tourniquets and one or two packages of stop-clot. Anybody who is shot by the police will probably be shot by rifles and shot multiple times. There won't be anything you can do for them. If they are not dead now, they will be within 15 seconds as they hemorrhage. Concentrate on the one or two patients who were accidentally hit. You can probably save them.

## 5.2. Stretcher-bearers

These are designated responders who aren't medical personnel and don't necessarily carry stretchers. Rather, think of stretcher-bearers as people who volunteer to help move patients out of harm's way - either to your aid tent or to the hospital. They need to know the fireman's carry, two-handed seat, four-handed seat and human crutch / two person drag.

Don't use medical personnel as stretcher-bearers; they are too valuable at your aid station. Stretcher-bearers should be composed of non-medical personnel who are strong enough to carry someone who is unconscious.

## 5.3. Clearly mark your aid station, your medical personnel and your stretcher-bearers with a red cross on a white background. Do not rely on an armband. If possible, wear an oversized white t-shirt with a large red cross painted or sewn to the front and back.

This may not prevent you from getting attacked, but it may give a more reasonable person pause which can allow for your escape.

## 6. Conclusion

The safest course of action is NOT TO PROTEST AT ALL. If you do protest, DO NOT APPROACH THE POLICE SKIRMISH LINE. Do not put yourself in danger. Make a plan to escape and a plan to meet up with your friends. If weapons or gas is deployed LEAVE THE AREA.

Be safe out there. Your life matters.