



The Mace Helmet

Ronnie London, protesting the use of Mace by Tucson police, displays an innovation he said was devised by California peace and civil rights demonstrators. The steel helmet shields from blows by nightsticks, the eye goggles turn aside sprays of Mace, he said. (Citizen Photo)

CITY COUNCIL DECIDES

Mace Won't Be Used Until Perils Probed

Chemical Mace, a disabling compound sprayed from a can, will not be used by the Tucson Police Department until reports concerning its possible hazards have been examined, the City Council has decided.

Such a report was issued last week by a research team at the University of Michigan. Police Chief Bernard L. Garmire said he would obtain a copy of the report immediately.

The council acted last night at the close of a two-hour public hearing on the use of the chemical. A dozen citizens urged the council to forbid the use of Mace until more is known about it.

Councilman G. Freeman Woods was absent, but the five remaining councilmen voted unanimously to suspend the use of Mace. Mayor James N. Corbett Jr. opposed the council's action, saying that Mace was used on "law violators" and the council's move is "not in the best interests of the law abiding citizens of this community."

Garmire said the department has used Mace six times since first buying a supply in October, 1967. The most recent use was in February, he said.

In none of the six cases was there any permanent injury to the victim, as nearly as could be determined. Garmire added.

The chemical gives the police an additional choice of weapons, hitherto limited to "the nightstick or the gun," he said.

"If I had the choice of having one of the three used on me, I'll take the Mace," Garmire said.

Police Capt. Carl Kempe,

head of the City-County Crime Laboratory, quoting a report by the surgeon general of the United States, said Mace contained tear gas, kerosene, a freon-type propellant to eject the spray from the can, all dissolved in a solvent.

The surgeon general said prompt treatment should be given to anyone sprayed with Mace. The best treatment is flushing with plain water, the surgeon general said, at the same time advising strongly against the use of any soap or salves.

Those against Mace said there have been reported cases of permanent damage to the skin and eyes. They spoke particularly against its use on a crowd of people, which would make treatment of all the victims impractical.

"My real concern is with the large scale use of Mace," said Dr. James E. McDonald, a University of Arizona physicist. "I visualize a very slim likelihood of 15 to 20 persons Maced in a demonstration or riot getting treatment."

Garmire said he didn't intend to permit the use of Mace under such circumstances.

McDonald said he considered the police search for alternatives to the gun and nightstick "a sensible idea" but what "sticks out all over" in the data on Mace is that not enough is known about it.

He noted the contents have never been made public because it is not yet patented.

Other speakers said the police would be tempted to use Mace indiscriminately.