

Effects of Macing Schoolchildren

Birmingham Police personnel assigned to the Birmingham City Schools (BCS) routinely use mace and pepper spray as a method of school discipline against schoolchildren, with disastrous effects. This chemical weapon causes serious injuries and creates a dangerous school environment for students and faculty alike.

The Facts

The Birmingham Police Department uses Freeze +P against Birmingham schoolchildren – a product that contains Orthochlorobenzalmalonitrile (CS) and Oleoresin Capsicum (OC). According to the manufacturer, they use these two chemicals because “[t]he strong respiratory effects of CS combined with the severe pain induced by OC magnify each other.”

Individuals exposed to pepper spray are at risk for serious health effects:

- Blistering and scarring of the eye
- Temporary loss of vision or blurred vision
- Persistent and debilitating pain and swelling around the eyes
- Crusting and blistering of the skin
- Chemical burns and allergic dermatitis
- Changes in skin color lasting for months or years
- Difficulty breathing
- Barking cough
- Inflammation of the lungs
- Severe or life-threatening asthma attacks

The Birmingham City School System is 96% African American. African American children have a five times higher death rate due to asthma-related complications than white children.

Asthmatics that are exposed to mace are at a high risk for severe and life threatening asthma attacks.

Individuals suffering from asthma can be hypersensitive to pepper spray, which may induce bronchoconstriction – a blocking of the airways causing coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath.

Mace is designed to be used as a last resort to protect public safety. But in Birmingham, mace is often used as punishment for ordinary teenage misbehavior.

In addition to the use of mace, the Birmingham City Schools have a record of using harsh discipline practices against schoolchildren including:

Instead of handling minor discipline issues in school, BCS students are often arrested and taken to Family Court. During the 2009–2010 school year, more than 85% of all school arrests in the Birmingham City Schools were for petty misbehavior.

Although the BCS educates only 25% of the county’s children, they were responsible for 66% of arrests made in schools county-wide during the 2009-2010 school year.