



THE JOURNALIST SURVIVAL GUIDE

AN ANIMATED VIDEO GUIDE



Lesson 4

What to do in case of attack with tear gas?

Tear gas is the common name for substances that, in low concentrations, cause temporary incapacitation through painful irritation of the eyes and/or breathing system. Tear gas is usually used for riot control. It is shot off in grenades. When shot in a closed space, the gas concentration can become very high, causing asphyxia & suffocation.

Exposure to tear gas causes:

- Stinging and burning of the eyes, nose, mouth and skin;
- Excessive watering of the eyes, runny nose, increased salivation;
- Sneezing, coughing, and even difficulty in breathing;
- Disorientation, confusion and sometimes panic.

Gagging and vomiting may also occur. People with respiratory, skin or eye problems, and very old or very young people, may be especially sensitive. Effects usually occur within seconds after exposure begins and symptoms usually end within 10-60 minutes after exposure stops. For some people symptoms can take a few days to clear up completely. Effects on skin may take longer time to improve.

If you see tear gas coming or get a warning:

- Try to move away or get upwind;
- Put protective gear, if available, minimizing skin/face exposure by covering up as much as possible;
- A gas mask, if properly fitted and sealed, provides the best respiratory protection;
- Alternatively, a bandana soaked in water tied tightly around the nose/mouth may prove adequate.

The following recommendations can help to limit consequences of contamination by tear gas:

- Stay calm, breathe slowly and remember it is only temporary;
- Blow your nose, rinse your mouth, cough and spit, try not to swallow;
- Do not rub your skin or eyes;
- Try not to touch your eyes or face, or other people, equipment, supplies to avoid further contamination.

If a casualty is seriously contaminated:

- Remove contaminated clothing with hands protected (e.g. use a plastic bag, disposable gloves, etc.)
- Wash the skin thoroughly with soap and clean water;
- If possible, shower with clean water;
- Irrigate the eyes with clean water, from the inside corner of the eye towards the outside, with the casualty's head tilted back and slightly towards the eye being rinsed;
- Advise less seriously affected casualties to apply these measures to themselves

Those measures will help casualties feel better faster, but they will still need time to recover. Clothes contaminated by tear gas should be washed separately from the rest of the laundry.

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Executive producer: **Maroun Sfeir**

Storyboard creation and animation: **kook creative studio**

Video Consultant: **Andrew Codd**

Translation: **Nour El-Assaad**

Voice over - Arabic: **Rima Khaddaj**

Voice over - English: **Andrew Codd**

Sound recording: **Creative Impact**

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