Extensive Use of Tear Gas on Portland Protestors Could Lead to Health Issues and Water Pollution

Police in Portland have been using tear gas on protestors since May, and officials are worried about the effect of the gas on the health of the protestors and the water in the area, especially the Willamette River. Since July 24th, the state has received 160 complaints about tear gas, in addition to comments on social media.

While aren't many studies on the long-term effects of tear gas exposure, which authorities have sprayed over protestors since George Floyd's death on May 25th, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says that prolonged exposure to riot control agents like CS gas can cause eye problems like scarring, glaucoma, and cataracts, and may possibly cause breathing problems such as asthma. A small sample of protestors has reported that frequent exposure to tear gas has altered their menstrual cycles. The Oregon Health & Science University released a statement on tear gas and COVID-19.

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> *While large gatherings in general provide increased opportunities for the transmission of COVID-19, the use of tear gas could significantly exacerbate the spread. Tear gas is a chemical that attacks the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, throat and lungs and causes severe pain and irritation; exposure to tear gas can result in blindness, bleeding, crying and coughing. The release of airborne droplets through tear gas-induced coughing could accelerate the spread of COVID-19 and lead to a surge in new cases. Damage to the respiratory tract can put individuals at greater risk of*

> *adverse outcomes if they become infected with COVID-19.”*
>
> *Danny Jacobs, President of OHSU*

In addition to human health, environmental regulators are also concerned about the nightly applications of tear gas. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has asked the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services to respond to that.

> *Due to the unprecedented amount of tear gas products used within the downtown area over the last 90 days, DEQ is requiring the City to conduct additional water quality monitoring…”*
>
> *Christine Svetkovich, DEQ Water Quality Manager*

The DEQ has also asked the city to report on the collections of lead, copper, barium, zinc, perchlorate, total chromium, and hexavalent chromium in the water supply.