Cover

How to do your laundry after a protest
Dealing with tear gas and other chemical weapons

Laundry Dos

If you've been hit with tear gas, pepper spray, or other chemical weapons, you should get out of those clothes as soon as possible and bathe in cold water.

• Do take care of your body before worrying about your clothes!
• Do use a sealed bag to transport your contaminated clothes!
• Do wear gloves and masks when working with contaminated clothes!
• Do include your shoes with your other contaminated clothes!

& Laundry Don'ts!

• Don't immediately wash clothes that are covered in pepper spray, tear gas, and other chemical weapons residue!
• Don't leave those clothes in a contained space (like a car trunk)!
• Don't use laundry pretreatments on those clothes!
• Don't wash those clothes with hot water!
• Don't mix those clothes with other laundry!

Contaminated Clothes Disposal

Sometimes disposing of your protest clothes is the most practical option. You'll need to place the clothes in a heavy duty trash bag and take it to your local hazardous waste disposal site.

Putting them in a dumpster runs the risk of exposing neighbors and trash collectors to harm. Do not burn contaminated clothes as heat can reactivate chemical weapons.
Wait to Do Laundry

Air out clothes you plan to keep for at least 48 hours, preferably outside and away from people. If you absolutely have to bring them inside immediately, keep them in open, well-ventilated spaces only and consider masking up. You can do an initial rinse with a hose outside to limit what contaminants you bring inside, but let your clothes dry again before bringing them in.

Some chemicals, such as CS powder, can remain active for as long as five days after being released. The longer you can air out your clothes safely, the better.

Doing Your Laundry

Wash your affected clothes on their own in cold water. Then wash them again in cold

water. Do not use hot water — you can reactivate some chemicals with heat and gas yourself.

You'll need a heavy duty detergent for washing chemical residues out of your clothing. However, use caution around using pretreatments, especially if you don't know what chemical you were hit with. Some chemicals can combine in unexpected ways.

There isn't much research on how chemical weapons interact with different chemicals, but anecdotes suggest that baking soda can help neutralize CS powder and that using detergents meant for cutting grease (or even dish soap) for neutralizing pepper spray.

Hang dry your clothes. You'll want to inspect them when they're dry to determine if you need to wash them again before you can heat them in a dryer.

After you've cleaned your clothes, run an empty cleaning cycle on your washing machine.

Resources
- Pepperspray, CS & Other "Less-Lethal Weapons": A zine discussing types of chemical weapons, available at https://files.sproutdistro.com/pepperspray_cs_other.pdf
- What to do if you're exposed to tear gas: A guide to protecting yourself at protests available at https://www.popsci.com/story/diy/tear-gas-guide/
- Hazardous waste disposal in Portland: Metro Transfer Stations https://www.oregonmetro.gov