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What Are Scoville Units?

By Nick Lindauer

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To understand what a Scoville Unit is, one must understand what they measure. All hot peppers contain capsaicinoids, natural substances that produce a burning sensation in the mouth, causing the eyes to water and the nose to run, and even induce perspiration. The primary capsaicinoid, capsaicin, is so hot that a single drop diluted in 100,000 drops of water will produce a blistering of the tongue.

Capsaicinoids are found primarily in the pepper's placenta - the white "ribs" that run down the middle and along the sides of a pepper. Since the seeds are in such close contact with the ribs, they are also often hot.

Capsaicinoid content is measured in parts per million. These parts per million are converted into Scoville Heat Units (SHU), one part per million is equivalent to 15 Scoville Units. The Scoville Unit is derived from a series of tests using a solution of water and sugar. The dilutions are increased until the chile no longer burns the mouth. Take for example, Blair's After Death Sauce which has been measured at 50,000 Scoville Units. To dilute the heat in one bottle of Blair's After Death, you would need over 3,000 units of water to dilute the heat to the point where the average human tongue could no longer feel it.

The hotter the chile of the sauce, the greater the amount of water required to dilute it becomes. The Scoville Organoleptic Test is still used, however it has mostly been replaced by a process called high performance liquid chromatography. This process converts measurements of capsaicin from the standard parts per million to the more popular Scoville Units.

Surprisingly, the bell pepper is used as a baseline for the Scoville Unit rating. The bell pepper essentially has a rating of zero Scoville Units, thus it acts as the lowest level of heat on the Scoville scale.

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On the other end of the scale is the Habanero pepper. At over 300,000 Scoville Units, the Habanero certainly sets the limit as the hottest pepper. The "Red Savina," the hottest strain of the Habanero, has been measured as around 577,000 Scoville Units. Pure capsaicin stacks up at 16 million Scoville Units!!!

Who is Wilbur Scoville?

A brief timeline of the man behind the heat scale

To chileheads and hot sauce lovers, he is the man behind the heat scale. Wilbur Scoville was born in 1865. In 1912 while working for the Parke Davis pharmaceutical company he developed the Scoville Organoleptic Test. In 1922, Scoville won the Ebert prize from the American Pharmaceutical Association and in 1929 he received the Remington Honor Medal. Scoville also received an honorary Doctor of Science from Columbia University.

Scoville wrote *The Art of Compounding* which was first published in 1895 and has gone through at least 8 editions. The book was used as a pharmacological reference until the 1960's. Scoville also wrote *Extract & Perfumes* which contained hundreds of formulations — after all Scoville had a knack for compounding. Scoville died in 1942 but his name will forever go on with the Scoville Heat Unit and in the lives of chili lovers everywhere.

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Pepper Spray: What Is It And How Does It Work

By Frank Go

Pepper spray (also known as OC spray—Oleoresin Capsicum), or capsaicin spray is an inflammatory agent. (A chemical that irritates the eyes to cause tears, pain, and temporary blindness) The spray is an organically based inflammatory agent derived from the active ingredient of cayenne peppers. Pepper spray typically comes in canisters, which are often small enough to be carried concealed in a pocket or purse.

Pepper spray causes immediate dilating of the eye capillaries resulting in temporary blindness, temporary paralysis of the larynx (which causes subjects to lose their breath), choking and coughing. The defensive spray also will create an intense burning sensation on the surface of the skin and nausea. The mucous membranes will swell to prevent all but life support breathing. After being sprayed subjects immediately cover their eyes and bend over into a defensive posture to avoid further contact. It is very uncomfortable and there is some pain associated with it. The result is temporary incapacitation, mostly due to not being able to see or breathe properly.

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OC Spray may not be quite as effective on addicts, intoxicated or hysterical persons. You may have to spray them twice with a good burst of pepper spray to have the desired effect. The length of the effects depend on the strength of the spray but the average full effect lasts around thirty to forty–five minutes, with after effects lasting for hours. The strongest concentrations are 15% active ingredients and rated at 2 million scoville heat units. The high scoville heat rating is more important than the actual percentage of pepper spray ingredients.

Pepper spray is often used to control riots or other violent situations as well as in self defense. A violent assault occurs every 15 seconds in the US and carrying defensive sprays are potent self defense products and safer than guns. Pepper spray is non lethal except under a few rare circumstances, depending on pre–existing medical conditions. There is rarely long term vision damage.

If one is infected with pepper spray, the best thing to do is to blink constantly. This will induce tears that can wash the pepper spray out of ones eyes. Washing one's eyes with soap such as mild non–oily degreasing dishwasher detergent can help you relive some of the pepper's irritation. The pepper spray has an effect of about half an hour until the effects ware off. Pepper spray is illegal in certain countries such as UK, and requires a license in most other countries including the United States, Canada, and Sweden.

For more information

and pepper spray Brought to you by Frank Go

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