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Pepper Spray Makes Safety Stylish

In a society where approximately one in four college women experience an attempted or completed rape each year, taking personal safety precautions is a smart decision.

Now Pepperface.com founder Mladen Djankovic wants to make it fashionable as well.

Djankovic is the brain behind the Pepperface.com Edition Palm Defender, a 1.8-ounce pepper spray that comes in a purple aerospace container.

According to the product's Web site, www.Pepperface.com, the spray is "designed to provide dependable, effective self-defense without compromising style or convenience."

Djankovic's creation was inspired by his desire to protect one important woman in his life.

"The woman I was dating had a friend who had been attacked and raped by a taxi driver, and we began talking about certain safety precautions women don't take," he says.

When pressed about the issue of her own personal protection, Djankovic's girlfriend admitted she did not carry pepper spray because it was big, unattractive and she had no place to put it.

Djankovic began searching for a more attractive spray but found nothing that was acceptable. However, he did discover that many of the pepper sprays on the market were not being advertised to the appropriate audience.

"I saw pepper sprays being sold on hunting sites and ammunition sites along with crossbows and nunchaku," Djankovic says.

"I know I don't go on those sites, so they certainly weren't reaching the young, urban females who needed the product most."

He then set out to create a pepper spray that could be marketed to more women.

He soon realized that the demographic most at risk for being the victim of an assault, young women between the ages of 18 and 35, was also the group most sought after by advertisers.

Because his audience was inundated with so many other advertisements, Djankovic searched for a factor that would attract attention and bring the personal safety device into the mainstream.

“We decided to involve fashion with it because we know that fashion and style are at the forefront of many females’ minds when they are making decisions about what they want to buy, whether it’s a car, clothes or a phone,” he says.

Most pepper sprays on the market are only available in black, but Djankovic chose the more stylish purple for the Palm Defender. The color is also a nationally recognized symbol of the campaign to end domestic violence.

Djankovic made the Palm Defender lightweight so it would be more convenient for women to carry. The slim device is about the size of a pen.

By summer 2006, accessories will be available that will enable women to carry the spray as they do iPods and cell-phones.

Djankovic says he is careful to reassure women that although he is trying to make pepper spray a fashion accessory, he takes the issue of violence against women very seriously.

“I never want people to think that I’m approaching the issue in a lighthearted way. I believe the use of fashion makes prevention and awareness about this difficult topic more approachable,” he says.

Djankovic says that besides making personal safety fashionable, one of his main goals is to educate people about an issue that is not often discussed.

“One of the biggest problems with violence against women is it is not talked about enough, and many victims don’t come forward because people are paying attention to other social concerns,” he says.

The issues that garner the most attention do so via awareness campaigns, such as Livestrong for cancer awareness and the Red Ribbon campaign for AIDS. With attention comes money to support the causes and public education about the issue.

“We want our campaign to be similar to the ones that are most successful but different because the causes are different,” Djankovic says.

“Diseases like cancer and AIDS have a chance for a medical breakthrough or advances in science that will bring about a cure, but there is no medical breakthrough for rape. We needed to stress awareness and prevention above all else.”

Djankovic says that unlike the ribbons and bracelets of other campaigns that serve only as symbols of the issue, the Palm Defender serves a dual purpose of education and prevention.

“The color and device itself is a reminder that the issue exists, and it can also be used to prevent the issue in the case of an assault,” he says.

In addition, Djankovic has formed partnerships with national organizations like the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Speaking Out About Rape (SOAR). These organizations are dedicated to ending violence against women through education and advocacy.

Links to national and state organizations and help line numbers are available on the product's Web site.

Two of the organizations listed, Men Stopping Violence and Men Can Stop Rape, focus on the role men playing ending violence against women.

“Men have a huge responsibility in this issue, not only to not participate in those activities but also to help women protect themselves against violence,” Djankovic says.

Palm Defenders and Heat replacement inserts are sold online at www.Pepperface.com.

Test inserts, which release an inert spray, are also available so users can practice with the product and become comfortable using it before an assault occurs.

Djankovic says that with the Palm Defender on the market, women no longer have an excuse for not taking precautions for their personal safety.

“The question is no longer why would you carry it but why wouldn't you,” he says.

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