



# Keeping You Informed on Important Career Issues

## Survey: Only 59% Of Police Agencies Require Body Armor Use

**New report issued by Police Executive Research Forum and Bureau of Justice Assistance includes data from the NLEOMF.**

Washington, DC—Nearly all law enforcement agencies report that they provide body armor to their officers, but only 59 percent of the agencies require their officers to wear body armor at least some of the time, according to a new report by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), a Washington, D.C.-based police research and consulting organization.

The report details the findings of a survey that PERF conducted in partnership with the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). The survey was sent to a large nationally representative sample of law enforcement agencies. Of all those who received the survey, 80 percent responded, for a total of 782 participating agencies.



Perhaps the research team's most encouraging finding is that almost all agencies responding to the survey—99 percent—ensure that body armor is made available to their officers.

"Our survey findings suggest an overall move by agencies towards promoting the wearing of body armor and providing the necessary resources to do so," the report states. "As a result of these policies, officers are probably more likely to be wearing body armor while assaulted in the line of duty, and the number of officer deaths is lower than it otherwise would be."

(Previous research indicated that in 1987, only 28% of police agencies surveyed provided body armor or a cash allowance to purchase armor for all of their uniformed patrol officers. By 1993, that figure had climbed to about 82%, and it rose to more than 90% in 2000.)

While the new survey indicates that body armor is now available to almost all officers, the PERF report suggests that police agencies can make further improvements in their policies and practices to help ensure that officers actually use body armor as much as possible, and to provide more thorough controls on fitting of armor to individual officers, maintenance of the armor, and periodic inspections to ensure that officers' armor is in good condition.

The report notes that there have been sharp fluctuations in the numbers of officers killed by firearms in recent years. In 2008, 39 officers died in firearms-related incidents, which was a 43-percent reduction from the 68 officers killed in 2007, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. The 2008 death toll was the lowest since 1956. However, in the first six months of 2009, firearm-related deaths increased 10 percent compared to the same period in 2008, from 20 to 22.

Detailed findings include the following:

**Most departments do not have written policies:**

Among the 59 percent of agencies that mandate that body armor be worn at least some of the time, fewer than half have a written policy on this issue, making enforcement of the policy more complex.

**Most everyday armor does not protect against high-caliber weapons or rifles:** Most agencies do not

issue for everyday wear body armor that protects against rifle or armor-piercing bullets, but most agencies at a minimum use body armor that protects officers against 9mm and .40 caliber bullets. Overall, these levels of protection offered to officers have been sufficient against most handgun threats, but not against threats from high-caliber weapons or rifles.

**Trauma plates:** Only 29 percent of the agencies surveyed issue supplementary trauma plates to officers for added protection for the most vulnerable part of the body, the torso.

**Fit and maintenance:** Most agencies do not have stringent fit and maintenance policies. Twelve percent of the departments said their officers are not fitted for body armor, other than receiving a size that approximates their body size. "Given the importance of fit to the proper functioning of body armor, as highlighted in the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) body armor standards, this percentage is of some concern," the report said.

**Inspections:** The vast majority of agencies (90 percent) do not conduct inspections to ensure that officers' body armor fits well and/or is maintained properly. Of the few agencies that do conduct these inspections, most frequently, inspections for fit are conducted only once a year or less (57 percent).

**Replacement schedules:** A large majority of law enforcement agencies (78 percent) do not have a database or automated record system for a body armor replacement schedule (e.g., replacement of armor every five years). Nearly one-quarter of agencies have no policy concerning replacement of body armor, and it not clear how often they actually replace their armor.

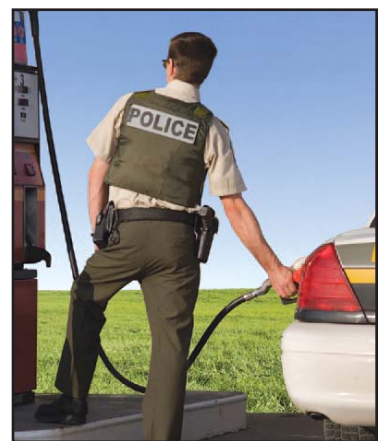
**Officers shot in areas not protected by armor:**

According to FBI data, 306 of 521 officers who were feloniously killed between 1997 and 2006 were wearing body armor. More than half of those 306 officers were shot in the head area, 9 percent in the neck/throat area, and 34 percent in the torso area. Of the 103 shots that hit officers in the torso area, 20 penetrated the vest because the vest was not designed to stop that particular weapon, while the remainder entered the torso through open side or shoulder panels, or above or below the vest. This finding suggests that in addition to body armor, other protection should also be considered, such as enhanced training on using cover/concealment during firearm incidents.

"Given the turbulent nature of the policing environment and dramatic variation over the past couple of years in the number of officers killed in the line of duty, there may soon be a need for a nationwide effort to encourage agencies to revisit their body armor wear policies to increase their comprehensiveness and stringency," the PERF/BJA report concluded. "We believe improvements can be made in terms of mandatory body armor wear requirements and more stringent fit/maintenance policies."

The BJA/PERF Body Armor National Survey: Protecting the Nation's Law Enforcement Officers is available online at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/pdf/PERF\\_BodyArmor.pdf](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/pdf/PERF_BodyArmor.pdf).

PERF is a membership organization of police executives from the largest city, county and state law enforcement agencies. PERF is one of 16 law enforcement organizations represented on the Board of Directors of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. For additional information, go to [www.policeforum.org](http://www.policeforum.org). ■



### The Key to Management

A frustrated manager complained to a colleague that he was thinking of firing an employee who didn't respond to techniques that had worked well with other employees. The colleague asked to look at the manager's key ring. Picking out one key, he asked: "What does this open?"

"The door to my station wagon."

"Will it unlock your wife's car, too?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, it's a perfectly good key. We know it works. Why don't you junk her car and get one that will open with this station wagon key?"

Obviously, the manager had another key that would operate his wife's car. In exactly the same way, it is obvious that another technique is the key to getting the employee to respond in the desired way. A technique that works well with one individual may be useless when used with another.

~Steven Brown, *Thirteen Fatal Errors Managers Make*



Unfortunately for Dave, the police dogs had only a very limited vocabulary.