

There is no such thing as a bullet proof vest, but there are bullet resistant vests.

Ballistic vests for law enforcement should be a number one priority for politicians and the public alike. There have been seventy thousand officers assaulted by firearms over a thirty-year period, and 92% of those deaths can be attributed to firearms. But due to the use of equipment, over 3,100 officers are alive today thanks to the use of the ballistic vest.

A vest's thick fabric material, usually manufactured under the name, Kevlar absorbs the force of the bullet and disperses it out over the body. Kevlar was originally made by DuPont as a way to make stronger vehicle tires. However, if the bullet actually penetrates the vest, the resulting injuries can be fatal. Vests will stop small arms and some shotguns but do not stop rifle rounds. They are also not able to stop knife strikes. Unfortunately, there are many rounds that are designed to defeat the vests, especially ones that have a metal core.

These vests are a lighter weight than their steel counterparts and can be worn comfortably for a twelve-hour shift. Many departments issue under vests for under the uniform but a growing trend is outer vests. These disperse weight more efficiently and can be removed at any time for a break during a hot day. Outer vests have had some complaints from the public as they look more militaristic and aggressive.

A lot of smaller police departments do not have a budget for getting every officer a vest. They can cost between 600 and 1,000 dollars and have a short life span, only 5 years. An officer must be refitted for a new one if they have lost weight or gained a lot of muscle, as the correct fit is important. Women officers must have a vest that

conforms to their bodies as well. The sides must be fan-shaped, so that they adapt to the female chest. In addition, the arm holes are bigger to reduce rubbing on the arms. The waist of the women's vests are also much wider and shorter than that of the men. This allows easy adaptability, and the shorter vest allows women to easily access their duty belts and tools.

A correct fit is the only way to provide the protection to an officer. A gap between the vest and body helps disperse the kinetic energy of a fired bullet, allowing the vest to stop it from penetrating, an officer and causing injury or death.

There are federal grant programs such as The Patrick Leahy Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP), created by the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 1998. This is a unique U.S. Department of Justice initiative designed to provide this critical resource of body armor to state and local law enforcement. Since 1999, the BVP program has awarded more than 13,000 jurisdictions a total of \$522 million in federal funds for the purchase of over one million vests (1,441,013) as of November 2020. Politicians need to be involved in this program and look for more ways to help departments get better equipment for officer safety. And look to create more programs for other first responders, like police k-9's, firefighters, and EMTs.

It is imperative that all officers have the ability to be safe while they protect and serve the public.