

Armor Inspection and Maintenance

Body armor is one of the most important elements of the equipment of law enforcement officers in America. Statistics show that over 2,000 deaths of cops have been prevented in the recent 5 years alone due to their body armor vests. However, to ensure it fulfills its intended purposes, the wearer must follow the guidelines in properly maintaining and cleaning the panels and carrier to prevent any damage. Even though body armor is strong enough to resist bullets, it's a sensitive piece of equipment that requires proper care and maintenance and can get easily damaged from improper storage or too aggressive washing detergents.

Proper size is very important with body armor. Some officers prefer a larger vest with the idea of adding more protection, but an uncomfortable fit may jeopardize your entire uniform. Law enforcement agents in the US are advised to get custom-fit vest for their body shape and dimensions.

The next part in ensuring your body armor remains as effective in protecting you from pistol and blade attacks is to properly maintain, clean and inspect it for damage regularly. You should follow closely the guidelines in the documentation you received from the manufacturer as not all general rules apply to all models of body armor.

The proper care of modern body armor requires taking certain precautions when cleaning the garment. Every model of armor that meets the NIJ standards has an instruction label indicating how to clean its components.

Proper Care and Wear

Ensure your vest is not too tight as this will result in creases forming along the strap lines. Creases in the vest may weaken the fibers over time and reduce its effectiveness in stopping bullets. Never weak your body armor without the Trauma Plates in the pockets provided on your Concealable Vest. Their purpose is to provide additional protection against Blunt Force Trauma in your most vulnerable and debilitating areas.

Unless the carrier is specifically designed to carry additional equipment (applicable to outer carriers only) you should not hang knives, guns, or other heavy items on your vest. The additional weight will affect the comfort of the vest, and will likely cause curling of the ballistic panels, which will surely wear out the strapping system prematurely, thus compromising the vest's integrity.

Inspection

Regular cleaning provides an excellent opportunity to inspect your vest for any signs of unusual or excessive wear. You should pay attention to any separations in the stitching or sealing of the armor panel itself; the "raw" ballistic materials should never be visible. Contact the manufacturer immediately if you spot any discoloration, tears, dents or any other damage to the structure so that proper repairs can be performed. Under no circumstance are you to try and repair the armor yourself as this is now only void the warranty but also, most likely, result in even more damage.

Maintenance

As a critical component of your safety equipment - your body armor should be maintained and treated as such. Clean your carrier separately from the ballistic panels but never machine wash, dry clean or tumble dry any of these. Both elements should be hand-washed with a soft sponge or damp cloth, mild soap and water. The ballistic panels should not be fully submerged in water and neither of the components should be dried in direct sunlight as UV rays and heat can accelerate the decomposition of the material.

One of the most common mistakes that compromises the integrity of the vest is incorrect insertion of the ballistic panels into the carrier after cleaning. They should be reinserted with the strike face of the ballistic panel facing the proper way. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions closely to ensure you do this properly. Improperly installed ballistic panels may not provide the full level of protection the vest is intended to confer.