

## Body Armor and Helmets

### 1022.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Soft body armor vests and ballistic helmets have been shown to be effective in reducing deaths and serious injuries. This policy outlines the requirements for use of the protective vests and helmets.

### 1022.2 POLICY

The Department provides soft body armor and ballistic helmets for officers and Police Service Technicians (PST) assigned to patrol in an effort to ensure that personnel engaged in uniformed field duties or high-risk situations are wearing necessary protective equipment. While body armor and helmets provide a significant level of protection, it is not a substitute for the observance of officer safety procedures.

*(Police Service Technicians assigned to patrol will only be issued soft body armor.)*

### 1022.3 AUTHORIZED BODY ARMOR AND HELMET

Body armor and helmets must be either Department issued or Department approved. The Department will replace the protective vests and helmets according to manufacturer recommendations.

#### 1022.3.1 EXTERNAL VEST CARRIER

Officers are authorized to wear an optional external vest carrier for soft body armor after being fitted and trained on use of the vest.

VPD recognizes that a standardized configuration of the external vest carrier may not be appropriate for all personnel due to variations in body types. VPD authorizes officers to wear certain equipment on an external vest carrier with the following guidelines:

- a. All pouches must be affixed to the external carrier utilizing a load-bearing system that is compatible with and designed for use with the integrated nylon webbing, i.e., M.O.L.L.E./PALS.
- b. All pouches affixed to the carrier must be black or patrol blue in color.
- c. The following items *must* be affixed to the vest:
  1. Badge or badge patch
  2. Name tape
  3. "Police" patch (front and back)
- d. The following items *may* be worn:
  1. Department issued equipment, such as handcuffs, Taser, OC spray, radio and ammunition magazines
  2. Flashlight

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3. First-aid medical equipment, such as trauma shears, tourniquet or gauze
4. Utility pouch
5. Patrol knife
6. Cell phone
7. Keys
8. Pens
9. American flag patch (2"x3", subdued silver, red & blue w/no other design, insignia or logo)

Carrier attachments shall not obstruct or impede access to firearm, Taser, magazines or radio.

In order to maintain the ability to properly identify as the police and insure professional appearance, all visible items attached to the external carrier should be muted and/or subdued in color. Attached items should not be brightly colored, excessive or detract from a professional appearance.

Officers are required to perform a weak hand draw with a Taser. Therefore, the Taser must be placed on the vest so the officer can perform a weak-hand draw. Transitioning to the strong hand after drawing with the weak hand is allowed.

Employees may not carry any other item, tool or piece of equipment on an external vest carrier unless specifically authorized by policy or by the Chief of Police or designee.

Officers must wear a Department issued or authorized shirt under an external carrier.

An external carrier vest may be removed when in a police facility or other secured facility with no public access.

### **1022.4 ISSUANCE OF BODY ARMOR AND HELMET**

The Police Resource Technician shall ensure that body armor and a ballistic helmet is issued to all officers and Police Service Technicians assigned to patrol when they begin service at the Vancouver Police Department and that, when issued, the body armor and helmet meets or exceeds the standards of the National Institute of Justice. Prior to being issued body armor, each person will be fitted by a manufacturer/sales representative to assure proper fit.

The Police Resource Technician shall establish a body armor and helmet replacement schedule based on the manufacturer's recommended replacement schedule and ensure that replacement body armor and helmets are issued whenever the body armor or helmet become worn or damaged to the point that its effectiveness or functionality has been compromised.

*(Police Service Technicians assigned to patrol will only be issued soft body armor.)*

#### **1022.4.1 USE OF SOFT BODY ARMOR AND HELMETS**

Generally, the use of body armor is required subject to the following:

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- (a) Officers shall wear body armor anytime they are in a situation where they could reasonably be expected to take enforcement action.
- (b) Officers may be excused from wearing body armor when they are functioning primarily in an administrative or support capacity and could not reasonably be expected to take enforcement action.
- (c) Body armor shall be worn when an officer is working in uniform or taking part in Department range training.
- (d) An officer may be excused from wearing body armor when he/she is involved in undercover or plainclothes work that his/her supervisor determines could be compromised by wearing body armor, or when a supervisor determines that other circumstances make it inappropriate to mandate wearing body armor.

If feasible, officers are required to wear a helmet in the following circumstances:

- a. During pre-planned tactical and other high-risk situations.
- b. Whenever a patrol rifle or shotgun is deployed by the officer.

Vests and helmets must be accessible to all sworn personnel during working hours.

#### 1022.4.2 CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF SOFT BODY ARMOR AND HELMETS

Soft body armor and helmets should be stored, cared for and cleaned pursuant to the manufacturer's care instructions provided with the equipment. The instructions can be found on labels located on the external surface of each ballistic panel or within the packing material. The armor carrier should also have a label that contains care instructions. Failure to follow these instructions may damage the ballistic performance capabilities.