

North Yarmouth Fire Department - Standard Operating Guidelines			Code: O-314
Ballistic / Tactical Vest Usage			
Developed: 11/01/2023	Approved By: Chief Gregory Payson	Effective Date: 11/30/2023	Date of Last Revision: 11/01/2023

Purpose:

To establish a procedure which defines certain unstable response environments where personnel shall use ballistic personal protective equipment (PPE) to provide added personal protection to maximize the strategic and tactical value of our resources while responding to victims of violent scenes.

Scope:

This document provides guidance to department members on the use of ballistic armor during potentially dangerous, unstable, or hostile situations, incidents, and/or scenes.

Due to the increase in violence against first responders as well as the change in expectations from the public about responses into violent scenes, the department will issue ballistic personal protective equipment (soft armor with ballistic plates) to all members who may respond to calls for service.

Definitions

Soft Ballistic Vest

A lightweight ballistic vest capable of resisting the impact of a bullet, strike, slash or stab. The minimum standard for the ballistic vest shall be NIJ level IIIA protection and NIJ Level 1 spike protection.

Level IV Ballistic Plate

A plate that is added to the lightweight ballistic vest to achieve NIJ level IV protection. Level IV body armor, the highest-rated armor recognized by the NIJ, is designed to offer unparalleled defense against high-velocity rifle rounds, including armor-piercing projectiles like .30-06 M2 AP("black tip"). A draw back to the Level IV ballistic plate is that it makes the ballistic vest less maneuverable and heavier.

Hot Zone:

The area where there is a known threat to life that is potentially direct or immediate. This includes an uncontrolled area where the active shooter could directly engage people.

Warm Zone:

The areas where law enforcement has either cleared or isolated the threat, and the risk is minimal or has been mitigated. This area may be considered cleared but not secure.

Cold Zone:

The area of where there is little or no threat. It may include the outside of buildings or an area where law enforcement has secured.

Ballistic / Tactical Vest Usage

Guidelines:

The intention of ballistic PPE is to provide added protection for personnel responding in to potentially dangerous, unstable, or hostile calls for service. It is still the department's intent to allow law enforcement to secure scenes and render safe to the greatest extent possible prior to fire personnel arrival or entry. However, there may be situations that develop around apparatus or personnel, i.e. civil disturbance, or that require department personnel to enter a hostile environment. Situational awareness and caution must be exercised to reduce or mitigate the threat while improving safety for department personnel.

Ballistic PPE will be available to staff or issued in the following locations:

- All Per-Diem Members shall be issued a Soft Ballistic Vest
- All Full-Time Members shall be issued a Soft Ballistic Vest
- All Live-In Students shall be issued a Soft Ballistic Vest
- Training Room (10 vests- Miscellaneous sizes)
- Car 1 (1 vest) (Car-1 will have 2 sets of Level IV Plates)
- A-56 (3 sets of Level IV Ballistic Plates)

For the safety of anyone participating in the rider program, i.e. third rider observer, junior firefighters, firefighters, paramedic or EMT students, etc., will not be issued ballistic PPE. The rider shall remain inside the apparatus any time that ballistic PPE is being utilized until advised otherwise by the incident commander.

Soft Ballistic Vest shall be worn on the following types of incidents:

- Any Stage for PD incident
- Suicidal responses
- Suspected substance abuse (drugs, alcohol, etc.)
- Reported mental health issues.
- Any situation that personnel deem necessary.
- Any report of Shooting or stabbing
- Any SWAT standby or deployment
- Any civil disturbance or riot
- Any reported active killer or police situation involving violence.
- Any reported domestic disturbance or fight in progress.
- Any incident that may involve an explosive device.
- When directed to do so by law enforcement.
- Any situation that personnel or the IC deems to be high risk, warranted, or necessary.

Level IV Ballistic plates shall be added to the Soft Ballistic vest in the following types of incidents:

- Any reported active killer or police situation involving violence.
- Any report of a shooting
- Any SWAT standby
- Any Incident that may involve an explosive device.
- When directed to do so by law enforcement.
- Any response to a Hot zone

Ballistic / Tactical Vest Usage

Any member responding direct (not on apparatus) to an incident when dispatch announces, “stage for Police”, and does not have a soft ballistic vest must stage and only after the scene after the scene is secure and requested by the IC.

Care, Maintenance, and Replacement

- Inspect ballistic PPE after each use.
- When the annual gear check is conducted, we will also inspect the ballistic PPE. This will be done by a member(s) who have been trained to do so.
- Ballistic PPE has an expiration date and shall be removed from service on that date. Expired ballistic PPE will be replaced on a scheduled basis per manufacturer’s guidelines and as the department deems necessary.
- If ballistic PPE is compromised or destroyed by either penetrating or blunt force trauma, it will be evaluated per the manufacturer’s guidelines and either repaired or replaced by the department.
- Soft Ballistic Vests must be cleaned after extended usage and or being contaminated
 - i. Do not machine wash or dry clean ballistic panel inserts.
 - ii. Remove ballistic panels from outer carrier.
 - iii. Wipe ballistic panels using a mild soap and water. Set aside to air dry.
 - iv. Close all Velcro fasteners on carrier.
 - v. Dry clean, hand wash, or machine wash carrier on a delicate cycle using medium water temperature. DO NOT BLEACH.
 - vi. Tumble dry on a low heat setting or air dry. Iron on a low setting as needed.
 - vii. Reinsert ballistic panels. BE SURE THE BALLISTIC PANELS AND OUTER CARRIER ARE DRIED COMPLETELY.
- Ballistic Plates (both level IIIA+ and Level IV) will be replaced at a minimum of every 5years and after an event it may have been compromised.

References

- International Association of Fire Chiefs
- Yarmouth Fire-Rescue
- Scarborough Fire Department
- Gray Fire Rescue
- Domestic Preparedness