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|  | <b>TRAVIS COUNTY ESD #5<br/>MANCHACA FIRE RESCUE<br/>Department Policy</b>   | <b>B109</b>  |
|   | Authorized by:<br><br>Fire Chief Chris Barron | <b>Effective:</b> 3-20-2023<br><b>Rescinds:</b><br><b>Reference:</b> TCESD6/TCESD10 SOG<br><b>Application:</b> Shift Personnel |
| <b>Ballistic Vest Armor</b>   |  |  |

**I. Purpose**

To provide information and guidance on the use, donning, cleaning, and storage of ballistic vest (body) armor. This policy will address operational use and apparatus carrying this type of personal protective equipment for use in high threat environments involving firearms and/or explosives.

**II. Background**

Firefighters are faced with various scenes which may or may not involve patients or assailants whose intention is to harm someone. Often times units are sent out on an assault, gun shot wound, stabbing, etc in which the individual committing the crime location is unknown and may pose a threat to those rendering aid. Although firefighters are to wait for law enforcement to deem a scene safe to enter, the firefighters still carry a risk of potential harm from the assailant returning or from the patient. To better equip our first responders with dealing with these type of situations, armored vests and helmets are being provided to be placed on front line apparatus.

First responder safety is paramount. Every active attack or violent incident will have its own dynamic variables and considerations. Deviation from this guideline to protect the safety of first responders may be required. The officer in charge will be the primary individual to make any necessary decisions regarding deviation from this guideline.

**III. Definitions**

- A. Ballistic Plates - Ballistic plates that are inserted into the plate carrier. The ballistic plates serve as the actual protection to the wearer from certain penetrating trauma projectiles including certain caliber bullets.
- B. Plate Carrier - The vest part of the body armor. The vest without the plates is not body armor.
- C. Level III Body Armor - Made of steel, the steel plates are capable of withstanding penetration from high velocity rifle rounds and small arms rounds. **DO NOT REMOVE THE WARRANTY STICKER FROM THE PLATES.**
- D. Level IIIA Body Armor - Level IIIA armor is a type of armor that will provide protection from many small arms weapons. Most handguns will not be able to cause serious injury to someone that is shot in this armor.
- E. NIJ III Kevlar Bulletproof Helmet - The helmet is constructed from Kevlar aramid material and provides a lightweight, robust protection from ballistic and fragmentation projectiles and other low energy threats.

- F. Armor Set - A “set” of armor shall consist of Level III plates, Level IIIA Body Armor with Level IIIA inserts, vest carrier and ballistic helmet. For the purposes of this policy, also referred to as Body Armor. A vest shall consist of 2 soft plate inserts or two hard plates. The plates are NOT to be removed or modified. Each vest will have a minimum of 2 soft dressings, 2 tourniquets, and an individual first aid kit to be used only for the first responder.
- G. Active Attack Incident - An incident in which an individual(s) is actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.
- H. Active Threat - Any incident by which its deliberate nature creates an immediate threat or presents an imminent danger to the community.
- I. Rescue Task Force (RTF) - The District crew(s) assigned to access and remove victims from within the warm zone of an active attack incident under law enforcement protection. The District officer or acting officer is the leader of the RTF, but the law enforcement element is responsible for security of movement and this has “veto power” on where the RTF can go.

#### IV. Policy

It is the policy of Travis County Emergency Services District No.5/Manchaca Fire/Rescue to allow law enforcement personnel to stabilize a situation/scene to the greatest extent possible prior to our personnel entering the area. As an added level of protection, body armor sets have been deployed on the frontline engine and the Battalion Chief vehicle. When moving to a reserve this equipment should move with other frontline equipment.

It is not the intent of the District for personnel to utilize body armor on a routine basis, but rather to have body armor available to personnel for incidents with potential active threats (violent, potentially violent) or otherwise a risk to safety that the use of body armor could reduce or eliminate. The officer in charge may mandate use of the body armor in any situation or circumstance that they feel may warrant its use.

#### V. Procedure

##### 1. Use Considerations

**The body armor is bullet resistant, not bulletproof.** It is designed to protect specific body organs and defeat certain types of ammunition rounds but will not protect the individual against all threats. Wearing the plate carrier without the plates will not provide the needed protection.

Officers may authorize equipment to be worn during training evolutions related to emergency response situations listed below:

##### 1. Wearing body armor is mandatory for the following:

- When assigned to a Rescue Task Force (RTF) in an active attack incident.
- Any “Active Threat” situation.
- Any event deemed appropriate by the Incident Commander.

##### 2. Wearing body armor should be considered for the following:

- Police/SWAT standbys or situations involving violence (shooting or stabbing incident).
- Incidents involving domestic violence, family dispute, or an address that has been flagged for known violence against public safety personnel.
- Any civil disturbance area.

- Any incident that may be interpreted as explosive device (suspicious parcel, bomb threat, etc.).
- Any call deemed necessary by the officer in charge of the crew.

3. As feasible, personnel dispatched to the above types of incidents should don their armor prior to arriving on scene. Body armor will remain in-place until the Incident Commander or officer in charge has determined the threat has been cleared.

4. Personnel assigned to special event standbys (protests, large gatherings, etc.) may voluntarily don body armor unless a mandatory directive has been issued by the on-duty Company Officer, Battalion Chief or Incident Commander.

## **2. Unauthorized Usage of Body Armor**

- Use of personally owned body armor is not permitted.
- District supplied body armor is intended to be used for emergency response only. Do not use District supplied body armor for PT or any other activities not related to emergency response or special events.

## **3. User Responsibility**

All personnel shall be responsible upon coming on duty to ensure the body armor is appropriately fitted for each crew member. The vests are adjustable to allow for different sizes. Follow the sizing directions listed in this policy.

To appropriately don the body armor the user should be standing up straight:

1. Inspect the body armor in its entirety for damage. If it's damaged, do not use it. Document damaged or out of service equipment using department logistic software.
2. Unclip the side straps and place your head through the shoulder straps. The carry handle (NOT A DRAG STRAP) should be on your back.
3. Adjust the velcro shoulder straps so that the top, center edge of the front panel is square with the clavicle. The bottom edge should be no lower than two (2) inches above the top of the belt.
4. Adjust the side straps to allow the front and back panels to come together and allow for movement and comfort (the vest may have to be removed several times to get the adjustment right). The vest should not ride up and down on your torso while you are moving or working. Donning the body armor with a partner requires a buddy check prior to entering the scene.

#### **4. Storing and Inspecting Body Armor**

Proper storage and inspections of body armor can help maintain the life of the body armor. Body armor is personal protective equipment. Store body armor flat or standing, not on edge, and never bunched. Additionally, store it in a clean, dry compartment out of the sunlight. Do not place anything on top of the body armor.

Personnel should inspect the body armor as part of the daily equipment check-off, following:

- Inspect the body armor in its entirety for damage.
- Any damage noted shall be reported to the company officer as soon as possible.
- Any damaged body armor shall be removed from service until repaired or replaced.
- There are two (2) ballistic plates in the body armor, the large plates on the front and back. The ballistic plates and soft armor inserts should be inspected for damage.
- Immediately notify the company officer if any body armor is missing.

#### **4. Cleaning of Body Armor**

To ensure the body armor is in top condition, it must be kept clean. To clean the carrier, all ballistic plates must be removed. Hand wash is the preferred method of washing the front and back carriers. However, in instances where decontamination from a medical incident is required, notify the officer in charge. (There may be a need to use the station washer, not the decon extractor, if the station washer is used then it must be used on the cold water and gentle cycle.)

Keeping body armor clean:

1. To hand wash, a damp cloth or sponge must be used and gently wiped to remove dirt or stains. If necessary, mild detergent may be used.
2. When complete, the garment must lay flat or hung to air dry.
3. Any debris from the Velcro attachment system must be removed.
4. To clean the armor, laying the armor on a flat surface. Use a damp cloth or sponge and gently wipe the ballistic plates to remove dirt or stains. A mild detergent may be used.
5. To clean the helmets:
  - Remove the mesh inside the helmets and machine wash on a cold, gentle cycle.
  - When complete, lay flat or hang to air dry.
  - To clean the helmet, take a damp sponge and gently wipe the helmet to remove dirt or stains. If necessary, use a mild detergent.
  - Notify your officer of any damage. The helmets can be repaired or repainted by the manufacturer.
6. DO NOT use the following items as they may damage the body armor:
  - Bleach, hot iron, fabric softener, deodorizing sprays (Febreze, Lysol, Alcohol spray, etc.).