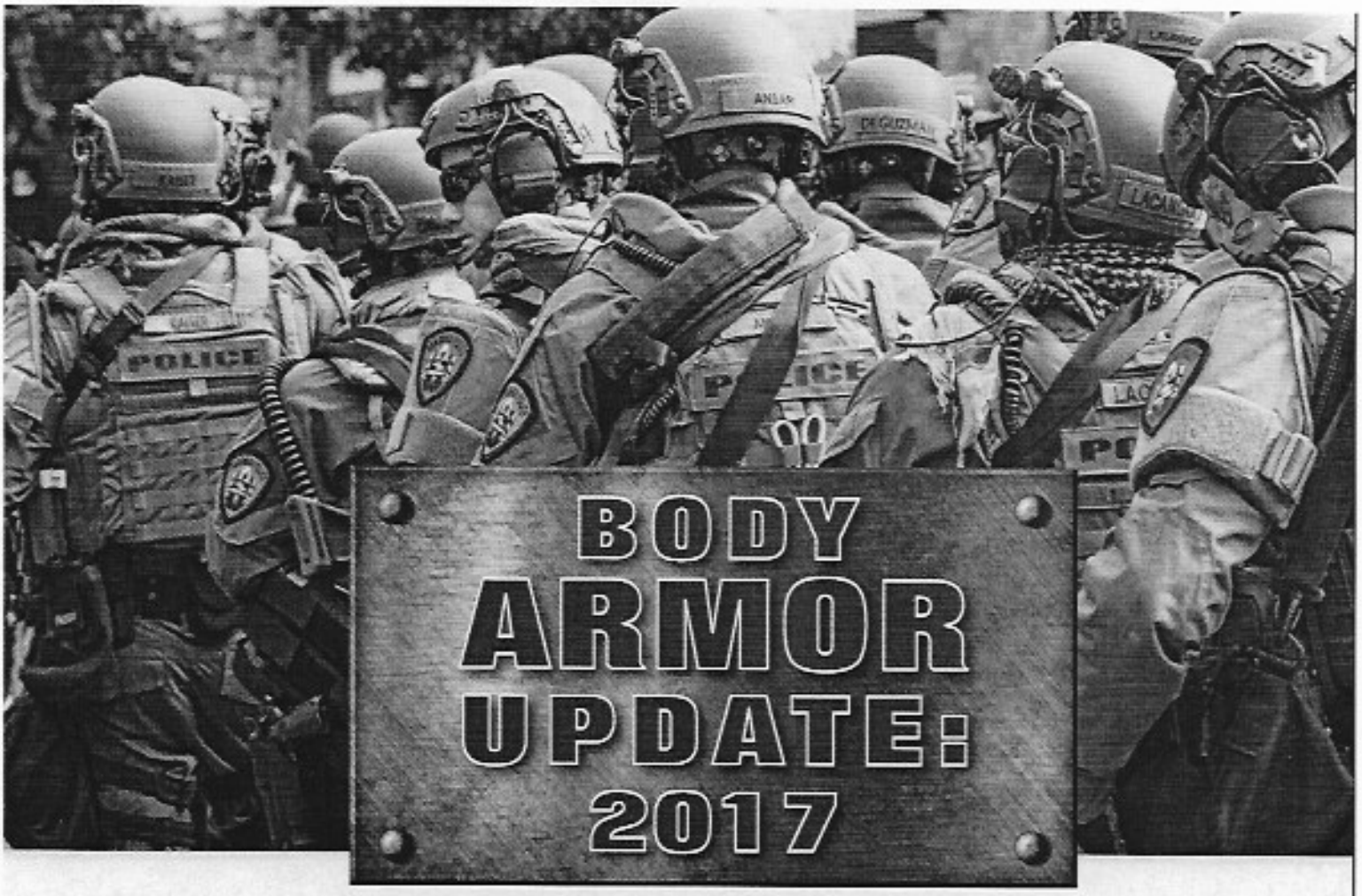


The 24th Annual Report on the Latest Advances in Ballistic Armor Technology and Design

Rebecca Waters

"I was very lucky, actually. We had a traffic stop...and I initially thought the guy was in need of medical attention. He had blood on his face, he was drooling, vomiting, and I kind of looked over the car a little bit and said, 'Hey, are you okay?'.... He had a .45 right under his leg...he pulled it out and shot me once in the chest. Luckily, I was wearing my body armor.... It was a dead-on heart shot...it saved my life."

Accounts like this one from Kyle Russell, a K-9 police officer with the Alexandria (VA) Police Department, of random attacks against police officers are becoming increasingly common. For many officers like Russell, body armor makes the difference between life and death. **(youtube.com/watch?v=uqysTJZ2yF8)**

State of the Industry

While there hasn't been a revolution in body armor technologies over the past year, industry experts agree that there have been incremental improvements in the overall weight and bulk of body armor solutions. "The reduction of weight and increased performance of body armor has been due to the advancement of Ultra-High Molecular Weight PolyEthylene (UHMWPE) materials like Dyneema®. Officers today are seeing the lightest and highest performing armor in the history of body armor," says Michael Foreman, EVP of International Business Development, Federal Sales and Marketing, Point Blank Enterprises.

"Achievements continue to be realized in the ongoing quest for thinner and lighter armor which maintains, or exceeds, the expected protection levels," says Georg Olsen, Sales Manager at U.S. Armor Corporation. "When their armor is fitted properly and tailored specifically to them, officers can no longer use the excuse, 'It's too heavy and uncomfortable!' This serves our primary goal which is to increase body armor wear rates."

Industry Challenges

Not all changes in the body armor industry are good, however. Olsen fears that the pressure to develop new products which are thinner and/or lighter may lead to the release of substandard products. "Being 'first' with something is not always a good thing, and manufacturers need to be careful not to take products all the way out to the performance limits...it's always wise to leave room for a margin of error," he says. An influx of companies in the industry is also worrisome, he says. "I'm very concerned about the dramatic increase in new companies marketing armor products which have no longevity or background experience with these products."

Body Armor Certification

The National Institute of Justice Compliance Testing Program (NIJ CTP) ensures that products meet stringent standards and perform as expected by maintaining a list of compliant products and provide manufacturers with statements of compliance to be placed on their products. Concerned that some manufacturers were mimicking the NIJ statement of compliance, the NIJ has now registered its new Certifi-


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cation Mark with the US Patent Office.

The NIJ Mark is currently in use only by ballistic-resistant body armor manufacturers and may only be used on specific models which have both demonstrated compliance with NIJ Standard 0101.06 and participated in the FIT surveillance program. **(www.justnet.org/howto/NIJ-Mark.html)**

"This registered mark will help officers and agencies ensure that what they require and order is in fact what they receive. Having the NIJ Certification Mark will help prevent knockoffs, protect the end-users and prosecute those who breach the market with substandard products," Foreman says.

Even bigger news regarding the NIJ is its plan to eliminate Level IIA vest certifications by the end of the year, Olsen says. "They feel that the increase in street level firepower has created the need to raise the protection. This would create a significant issue for agencies who currently issue the Level IIA vest, including some very large agencies like the Chicago PD and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department," Olsen adds.

Shopping for Body Armor

"Shop for 'best value,' not lowest price…they are often not the same thing," recommends Olsen. "When you publish highly limiting, 'tight' bid specifications and award based solely on price, you cheat yourself out of the chance to compare several product offers and select what's best for your agency."

Be sure to test and evaluate prospective body armor purchases and confirm their technical data, Foreman says. It is a misconception that all published data and specifications are accurate.

Olsen concurs, "I have also noticed a highly disturbing trend of ballistic plates being marketed which imply they will do things they cannot do. In-house testing by the manufacturer is not the same thing as testing by an NIJ Certified Laboratory, and documentation should be required."

Olsen and Foreman also agree on the importance of insisting that vendors have proof of product liability insurance. "Be sure that the supplier has current and sufficient liability insurance coverage; require that it provide a Certificate of Additionally Insured," Olsen says. The product manufacturer should also have and maintain ISO Certification of its manufacturing and business processes during the entire useful lifespan of the armor you are purchasing, he adds.

Common Misconceptions

Education is crucial in ensuring that body armor effectively saves officer lives. Some common misconceptions can put officers in danger. Foreman identifies the belief that In Conjunction With (ICW) plates can be used with any soft armor as a frequent misconception. "ICW plates are only certified with the original ballistic solution they are tested with," he cautions.



As women's roles in law enforcement continue to grow, body armor is being designed specifically for the female physique.

The most common misconception I encounter involves soft (or hard) trauma plates worn on the chest area of concealable vests, says Olsen. "They are called *trauma plates* because that's what they are for – to provide additional protection against blunt trauma injuries in the most vulnerable area, not ballistic protection. A Level IIIA is a Level IIIA, no matter what it's made from, and two of them together won't make a Level III," he notes.

Female Body Armor Fit

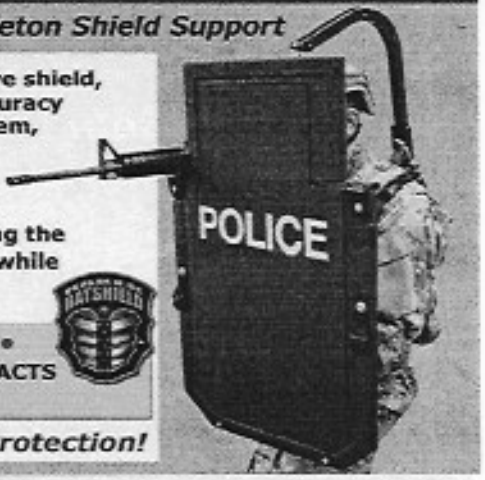
As the number of women in law enforcement increases, so has the need for gender-specific body armor. Body armor for women specifically modifies the fit over the officer's chest and hips to ensure that women can achieve the same

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NOTICE: **The latest Baker Ballistics model of rifle protective shield, the MRAPS®-IV-XL, combined with Advanced Accuracy Solutions innovative "The Reaper™ exoskeleton shield support system, have jointly created the world's only man-carriable NIJ Level IV ballistic shield large enough to protect multiple tactical team operators from dangerous armor-piercing rifle threats.**

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level of protection and comfort as men, a US Department of Homeland Security Tech Note explains. "When flexible armor is designed for the female physique, there are typically two different panels used – planar for the back and nonplanar for the front. Nonplanar panels are comprised of the same materials as planar panels, but are enhanced with additional stitching and folds to conform to the female physique."

In 2015, an NIJ CTP Administration Clarification document specified that body armor containing two panel designs must undergo two sets of testing to ensure compliance with Standard 0101.06. Furthermore, the 2017 application for Bulletproof Vest Partnership grants requires law enforcement agencies seeking funding for body armor through its program to certify that they are aware of, and will comply with, the 2015 rule which states that grantees must provide armor vests to law enforcement officers, including vests uniquely fitted to individual female law enforcement officers.

Material Innovations

The US Naval Research Laboratory may have solved the inherent weight problem of body armor with its new lightweight, transparent, thermoplastic, elastomeric armor. The material purportedly has superior ballistic properties and can be repaired in the field due to its crystalline structure. Simply heating the armor to 100° Celsius melts the crystallites, allowing them to meld and reform, says Dr. Mike Roland, Senior Scientist, NRL Soft Matter Physics. In addition to applications as a coating for helmets and armor, the material could replace bulletproof glass. **(http://tinyurl.com/y9dzqx3q** or **http://tinyurl.com/l9t4z8m)**

Foreman and Olsen caution against betting too much on the emergence of dramatically new technologies, however. "There has been new media attention on the potential application of 'shear thickening fluids,' " Foreman says of the metal foam technology we reported on last year **(http://tinyurl.com/harrjkv).** "Research and development of this technology has not resulted in the application of its use in body armor yet."

"There has been some recent buzz about 'new' materials and construction methods, but they are actually derived from older technology which has been around for a while and still hasn't been proven consistent enough for regular commercial application," Olsen says. "Also, any truly revolutionary technological achievements in personal armor would most likely be commandeered for military applications and not be available to law enforcement for some time."

New Ballistic Protection Products

ATS Armor™, LLC

At six pounds, ATS Armor's Type IIIA Patrol Shield provides ultralight, multishot handgun protection. With a high density foam arm guard and adjustable VELCRO® straps, this 20" x 30" reversible design works for both right- and left-handed shooters. Optional features include a rectangular shape, a larger size, a Level IIIA ballistic viewport and a light system.



The Type III Tactical Shield from ATS Armor™ weighs in at 19 pounds.

The Type III Tactical Shield offers lead core rifle rated protection and weighs just 19 lbs. This 20" x 30" shield provides multishot protection. Optional features include a larger size, a Level III ballistic viewport, a horizontal handle and a light system.

ATS Armor's QuadCurve™ ICW hard armor plates are available in Type IIIA, III, III++ and IV. The Type III, III++ and IV plates are certified to the current 0101.06 standard (NIJ does not have a standard for hard plates at level IIIA) and are compliant with the NIJ's new Certification Mark labeling requirements. **(atsarmor.com)**

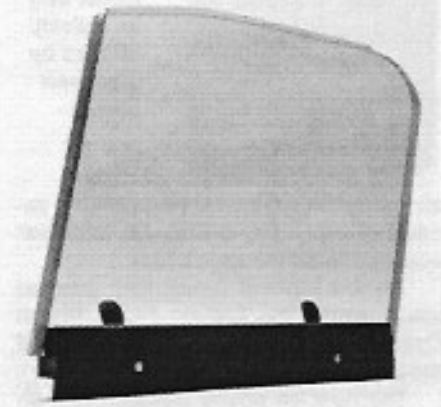


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BODY ARMOR UPDATE: 2017

Angel Armor™

Angel Armor's Enlight™ Window Armor is a drop-in clear vehicle armor panel which provides NIJ Level IIIA defense while allowing for civilian interaction. The Avail™ Ballistic Door Panels – providing customers with full door coverage and designed to pair with the Enlight Window Armor – are now available as an NIJ Level III door panel for select vehicles.



Enlight™ Window Armor does not interfere with door functionality.

The enhanced Truth SNAP™ Magnetic Plate System consists of modular trauma plates which deliver concealable rifle threat protection for extended all-day use. The Truth SNAP system provides tiered threat protection, allowing users to armor up or down as the mission requires. **(http://armor.angelintelligence.com)**

Armor Express

The Razor™ Gen 2, Armor Express' lightest ballistic armor is NIJ 0101.06 certified and utilizes a proprietary blend of Twaron® aramid and Dyneema fabric which features extremely thin construction and reinforced stopping power.

Their new Laser Cut Plate Carrier (LCPC) is designed to fit most hard armor plates and gives the operator a platform with laser cut MOLLE attachment points which will accept most MOLLE pouches, IFAKS and pockets. At less than 3/4 pound, the LCPC is a hard armor solution which won't soak up or hold water when wet, keeping the carrier lighter and dryer than standard MOLLE material.



The Razor™ Gen 2 utilizes a proprietary blend of Twaron® aramid and Dyneema® fabric.

Armor Express' next generation Ara-Shock Level IIIA plates, as well as H-Shock, C-Shock and Harrier rifle plates offer improved ballistic performance, modularity and size options for any threat encounter. **(armorexpress.com)**

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The new Laser Cut Plate Carrier from Armor Express will accommodate most hard armor plates.

Baker Ballistics

Baker Ballistics' new large-sized model of MRAPS® Series NIJ Level IV ballistic shield, supported by The Reaper™, an exoskeleton load-bearing invention by Advanced Accuracy Solutions, provides tactical shield users the ability to deliver dominating firepower while safely positioned behind a highly maneuverable NIJ Level IV ballistic shield. The Reaper Shield Support (TRSS) system is lightweight, fully enclosed, adjustable, durable, and portable. The system eliminates operational equipment weight positioned forward of the user, transferring it to the torso, allowing for effortless vertical, horizontal, shock-absorbing shield support, and creating a stable weapon aiming platform capable of supporting a long gun to deliver accurate firepower upon threat.



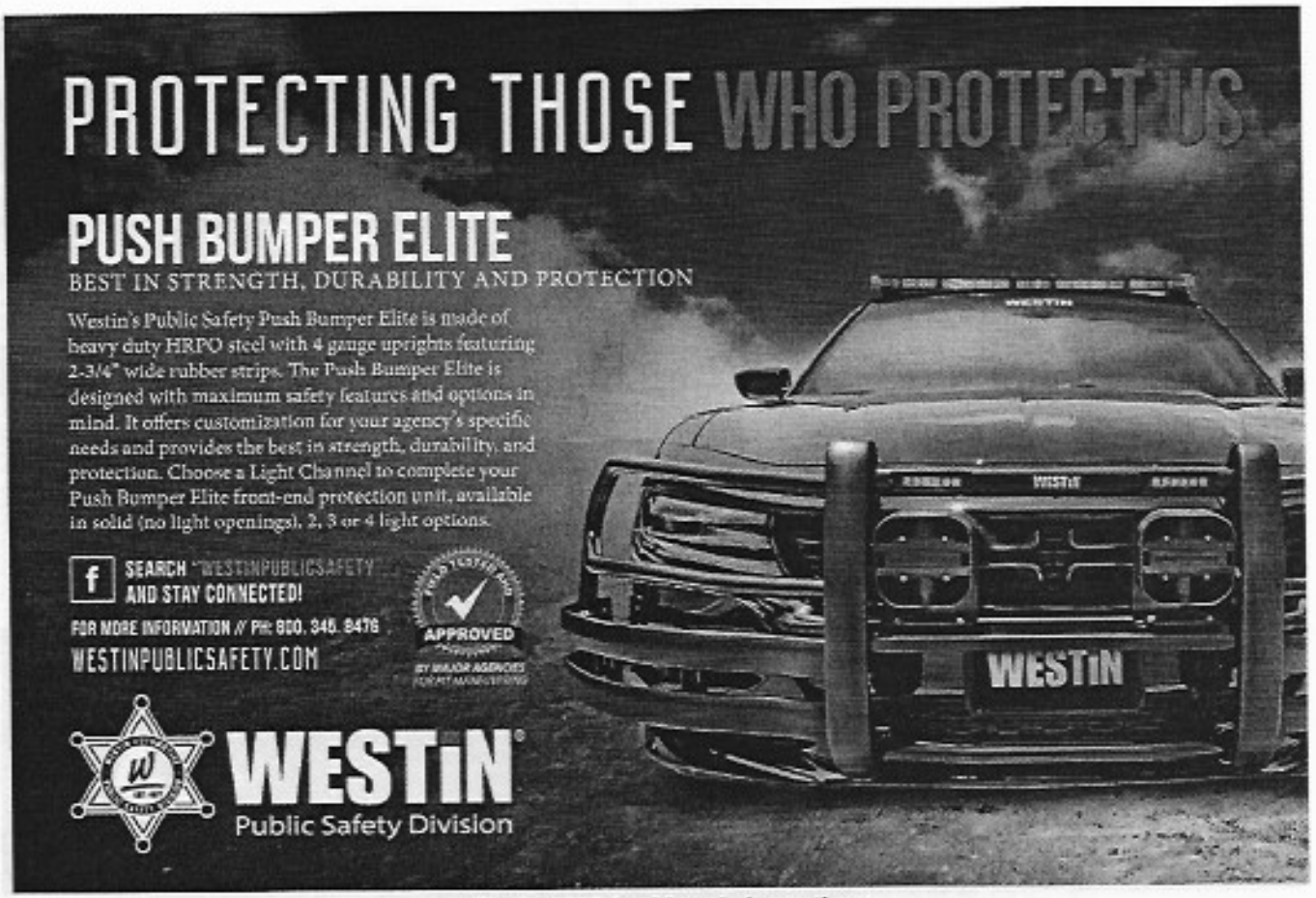
The TRSS system allows an NIJ Level IV ballistic shield to be exceptionally maneuverable.



Baker's Ballistic Rough Operations Cover can be quickly utilized by a second officer.

A new optional (Level IIIA) armored shield cover, the Ballistic ROC (Rough Operations Cover), has recently increased the capability of the system.

The new ten pound Ballistic ROC offers a number of advantages – this armor



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BODY ARMOR UPDATE: 2017

panel can be quickly lowered to provide additional Level IIIA cover beneath the shield, dropping down to protect the operator's legs, including the knees.

The B-ROC can also quickly detach from the primary rifle protective shield, providing an additional large-size ballistic shield for use by a second officer. Both the MRAPS-IV-XL and Ballistic ROC shields allow ambidextrous use of handguns or long guns to allow accurate return fire. **(bakerballistics.com)**

DFNDR Armor™

The DFNDR Level III+ rifle plate is NIJ 0101.06 certified, lightweight (2.5 lbs. M) and special threat tested. DFNDR Armor is engineered with high-grade ballistic materials: an UHMWPE fiber bound with a resin matrix to make it a rigid standalone hard armor system. This plate is tested at muzzle velocity, mitigates spall and has no deflection.



DFNDR™'s lightweight Level III++ rifle plate features a multicurve ergonomic design.

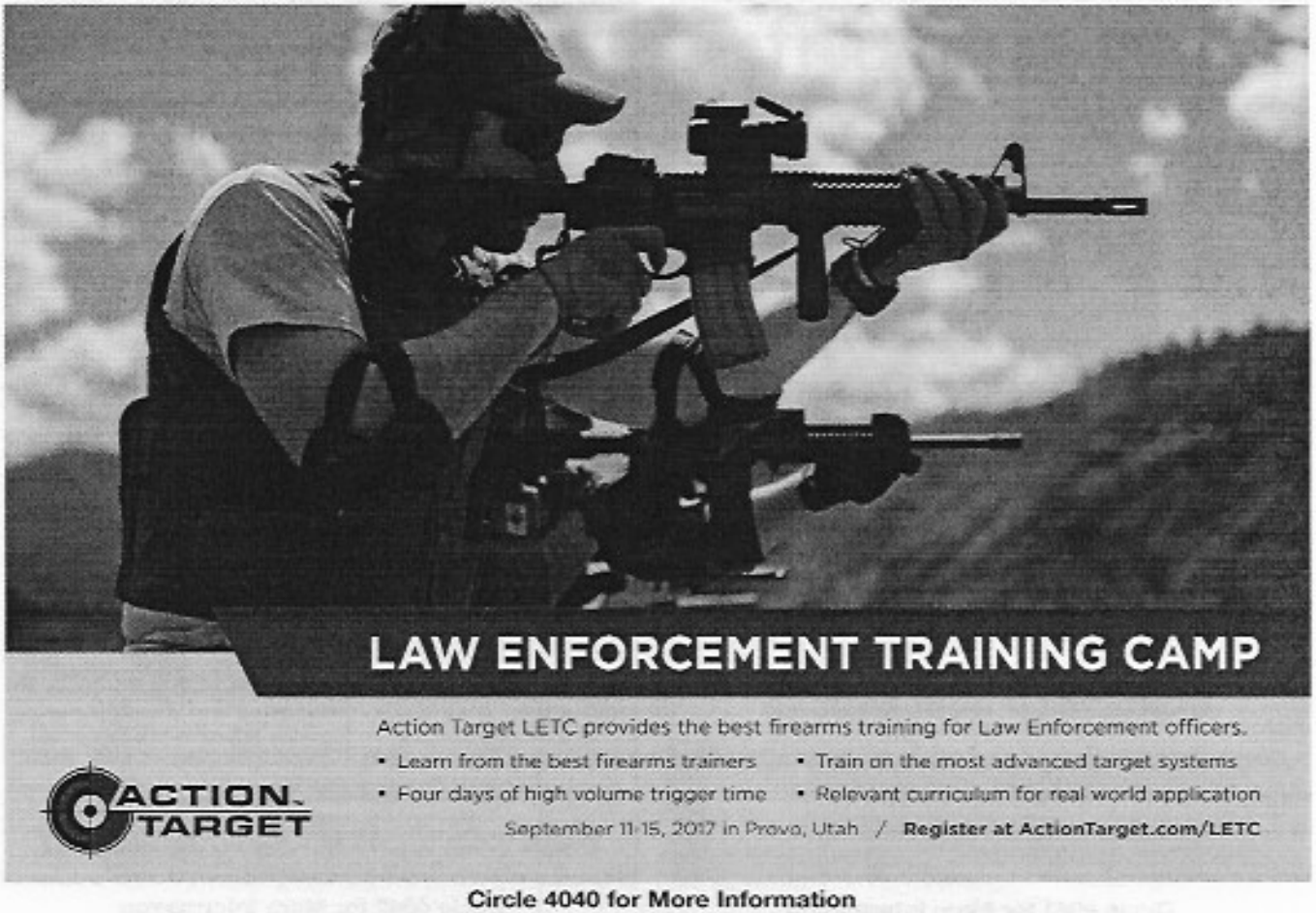
The DFNDR lightweight Level III++ rifle plate weighs 4.0 lbs. (M), features a multicurve ergonomic design and is rated for multihit. Developed to stop the 5.56x45mm M855/SS109 green tip threat, the system is integrated with an UHMWPE fiber. The plate has been tested at an NIJ complaint laboratory in accordance with the NIJ 0101.04 protocol standard. **(dfndrarmor.com)**



The new PH2 offers optional cummerbund ballistic inserts.

GH Armor Systems

GH Armor's new PH2 Tactical Plate Harness is designed for rapid response in active shooter situations. This plate harness is built in both shooter's and full cut platforms, as well as standard and slim fit for varying plate thickness. Optional padded shoulders provide weight distribution and expansive MOLLE webbing allows for customization. The PH2 provides ex-



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In Action

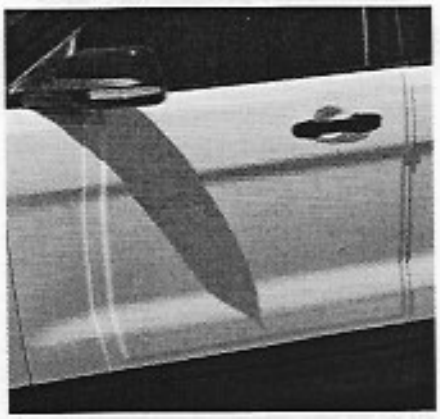
New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio plans to spend $10.4 million to outfit all New York Police Department patrol cars with Hardwire®'s bullet-resistant window armor, following a pilot program which began in 2016. The city had already allocated $6.8 million to install the company's bullet-resistant panels on the department's 3,813 patrol cars.

tended coverage with a fully adjustable cummerbund and optional cummerbund ballistic inserts. **(gharmorsystems.com)**

Hardwire®, LLC

The Hardwire "B-Kit" Vehicle Door Armor panel attaches to the outside of a vehicle door using anti-tamper fasteners. The lightweight, high performance armor provides NIJ Level IIIA+ protection. The armor skin is OEM color matched to blend with existing vehicle color and accepts decals to match police department markings. Designed with durability in mind, the armor will remain securely in place during vehicle operation in any scenario.

The Hardwire Transparent Armor Window Insert is a custom designed piece of transparent armor which seamlessly covers the existing window in a police car door. It provides ballistic protection (NIJ 0108.01 IIIA+) for the officer while still allowing for community engagement. Armor protects against handgun and shotgun ammunition. The insert requires no modifications to the car and the OEM window still operates normally. Windows are available for various vehicle variants, including Ford Interceptor, Impala, Taurus, Chevy Van, and others. **(hardwirellc.com)**



Hardwire®'s "B-Kit" Vehicle Door Armor provides NIJ Level IIIA+ protection.

Point Blank Enterprises, Inc.

Point Blank is now providing a patented, ultralightweight, laser cut fabric for select tactical carriers with greater ripstop and strength than previous fabrics on a weight by weight and thickness basis. Engineered to withstand extreme environmental conditions while providing lightweight comfort for extended wear, this laser cut fabric is ideally suited for tactical operations.

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BODY ARMOR UPDATE: 2017

PACA and PARACLETE® vests. ARMORVENT utilizes an air channel ventilation pattern which helps to evaporate sweat. It also conducts heat away from the skin and helps to prevent the growth of bacteria. ARMORVENT panels are available in multiple sizes and can be integrated into a carrier or purchased as a retrofit kit.

Ultralight, durable and constructed with Point Blank's laser cut technology, the Bikini Plate carrier accommodates Level III or IV hard armor plates and equipment pouches in a webless design. This new plate carrier has excellent load bearing capabilities, enhanced adjustability and a contoured shape for increased movement.



ARMORVENT® utilizes an air channel ventilation pattern which helps to evaporate sweat.

For instant access to essential gear, the PARACLETE Chest Rig, which is very lightweight (.65 lbs.), allows an operator to quickly don it over existing body armor and deploy equipment. The chest rig can accommodate a variety of pouches to hold pistol/rifle mags, a med kit and a variety of emergency items.

Adding the new PARACLETE Pylon Belt to tactical vests greatly improves weight distribution while minimizing fatigue. The Pylon Belt works by redistributing the weight from the shoulders to the pelvic area. Ergonomically designed to contour to the body, it not only improves the comfort of the vest, but also allows the operator to load additional equipment, as needed. It also allows for optional ballistic inserts for added protection.

The WARSOC™ (Warrior Special Operation Carrier) H3 Buckle System is specially engineered for tactical armor systems and plate carriers. It utilizes a slim "H" shape with a dual independent locking mechanism which allows an operator



The new Bikini Plate carrier accommodates Level III or IV hard armor plates and equipment pouches.

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to easily secure the vest while providing a faster deployment option, as well as prohibiting accidental or undesired release. **(pointblankenterprises.com)**

Safariland®

Safariland Armor's Matrix™ family of ballistic packages is engineered with a new proprietary hybrid design through a partnership with Teijin and Honeywell®. By combining woven material with Honeywell Spectra® and other nonwoven material, this lightweight panel provides a balance between blunt trauma reduction and ballistic resistance. Available in Level II and Level IIIA threat protection levels for both males and females.

With the integration of FirstSpear®'s polymer closure system, PROTECH®



PROTECH®'s All Purpose Vest utilizes the FirstSpear® polymer closure system.



The Boltless Helmet Suspension System is available on the Delta™

Tactical's All Purpose Vest provides full coverage ballistic protection with an additional closure option for comfort and ease. The FirstSpear Tubes™ closure system modernizes the tactical carriers, enhancing the ease of donning and doffing with a quick up or down single hand function. This lightweight closure system ensures the cummerbund is always positioned in the same location which is vital for proper ballistic coverage, and mitigates the risk of misalignment and incorrect attachment.

PROTECH's Boltless Helmet Suspension Systems maintain the helmet's ballistic integrity by eliminating bolt holes and feature a four point retention (either with pads or the R2S™ ratchet), thereby providing greater comfort with more adjustment options. The Boltless Helmet Suspension System is available on the Delta™ 4 line of helmets.

The Entry 1 FR US ballistic shield is the first in a series of Type IIIA Boltless Ballistic Lens Caps from PROTECH Tactical. The boltless design decreases the shield's overall weight and increases functionality by eliminating the risk of a round penetrating a bolt or seam. The Entry 1 FR US shield is 24" x 36" with long arm weapon cutouts.

An economical 6.9 lb. multicurve Type IV plate, the Model 2014MC is NIJ 0101.06 compliant and addresses active shooter protection for first responders. Available in 10" x 12" shooters cut and 6" x 6" single curve, mini side plates, the Model 2014MC fits all PROTECH Tactical platforms and plate racks.

Until now, the R2S Ratchet System was only offered with a mesh crown suspension system. Now, this system is available with padding suspension which provides users with a more comfortable fit and is available on the Delta 4 and Delta 5 line of helmets which are available in full-, mid- and high-cut. **(safariland.com)**

U.S. Armor Corp.

The Enforcer 6000 is made in the USA using Core Matrix® technology with UHMWPE fibers from Honeywell and DuPont®. These are combined in a thin, lightweight, low stitch ballistic package for a high performing, NIJ .06 certified ballistic vest (male < 1 lbs. per square foot). The Enforcer 6000 provides Level IIIA protection against .357 SIG (125-gr. FMJ) and .44 Magnum (240-gr. SJHP) rounds. **(usarmor.com)**

Looking Forward

What do we have to look forward to in the body armor industry over the next few years? As rifles become more common in armed confrontations, the industry has begun to shift its focus to advancements in hard armor technologies, Olsen and Foreman say. "There will be a redirection of weight reduction and performance increase goals to hard armor products, such as antirifle plates and ballistic helmets," says Olsen, "and there are definitely some gains to be realized there. I also see a renewed and expanded interest in improving hard armor for wider applications, such as armored door panels for police cars, public building entrance applications and speaker podiums for police and government officials."

Foreman and Olsen also agree that we will see a contraction in the number of vendors in the industry. "I believe there will be a consolidation of brands within the industry and that the updated NIJ standards will eliminate or make it more difficult for companies to offer products which could put officer safety in jeopardy," Foreman says. **P&SN**

Formerly the Editor-in-Chief for Forensic Magazine, *Rebecca Waters is a freelance writer and editor.*



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