How To Select the Right Body Armor for Your Specific Needs?

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If there is a chance you could find yourself in a situation where bullets are flying, it may be time to buy a bulletproof vest. These vests are usually made of very strong Ultra High Molecular Weight Polyethylene Fibers like Dyneema or strong Aramid fibers like Kevlar. Oftentimes, when ballistic panels are being made, the body armor manufacturer will use both fabrics together in a so-called hybrid panel design.

When selecting your bulletproof vest, it's critical that you understand and consider all options before making your decision. You must ensure that the vest you choose fits you properly so that you have maximum protection. You should be fully educated on the various and be properly measured so that your vest fits comfortably while offering you the right level of protection.

Before doing anything you need to find out if it is legal for you in your area to buy and wear body armor. People who've been convicted in a court of law of a violent crime are not legally permitted to wear body armor anywhere in the United States.

Also, there are countries, like Australia, where you need to get a permit before wearing a bulletproof vest. Go online and search federal laws as well as laws in your local area regarding the wearing of ballistic vests. Verify whether or not a permit is needed to buy one. If one is needed, follow the laws and obtain the required permit before trying to make a purchase.

Once you're ready, here the steps we recommend and some things to consider when you first set out to buy body armor:

1. Make your mind up to stay within you budget when selecting a vest.

Decide how much you want to spend on your vest and do not go over your budget. It's easy to spend more on a vest you like the style of or one that has a higher level of protection than you need or some additional features. But, if you keep looking for what you realistically need, you should be able to stay within budget.

2. When considering your budget, you should know that you would need to replace your vest if a bullet strikes it and if not, every five years.

If a bullet strikes your vest the ballistic plate can crack or otherwise be damaged. You have no choice but to replace it. We also recommend that every bulletproof vest be replaced every five to ten years even if it is rarely used. After just two years, the materials it's made of will start loosing strength at a very slow pace. A vest that's expired might be able to stop a bullet, but you don't want to take any chances.

3. Determine whether it's best to wear a concealed vest under your clothing or an external vest.

If you're just an average civilian or an investigator working undercover, you'll want to wear a concealed vest under your clothing. Military personnel and those working in law enforcement typically wear external vests with body armor plates since they are much easier to quickly put on and take off.

4. The vest you choose should be capable of stopping a bullet fired from your own gun.

If you plan on carrying a gun yourself, the vest you wear should be strong enough to stop a bullet fired from your own gun. Preferably at point blank range. This could save your life if someone disarms you and fires at you with your own weapon.

5. Select the type of vest that matches the threat level you may be facing.

If the threat you are most apt to encounter would be from handguns, a Level IIA, II or IIIA ballistic vest, would be recommended. These level vests are relatively light and thin; yet can still protect against small arms fire.

However, if you are entering more dangerous territory, like a war zone, you'll need a higher level of protection, such as a Level III or IV vest capable of stopping rifle fire. It is crucial that you determine which type of environment you're going to be facing and all potential threats:

These are our recommendations:

- If you're an average civilian who won't be anywhere near a war zone, get yourself a lightweight vest that can be worn under your clothes.
- If you need protection from handguns, the Level II vest can stop bullets fired from .357 Magnum and 9mm caliber handguns.
- The IIIA vest will stop bullets from larger caliber handguns, like a .44 Magnum or a .357 SIG.
- For maximum protection, buy a Level IV ballistic vest because it can protect you against .30 caliber armor-piercing bullets.

6. Consider whether you are more in need of stab resistant armor to protect you against knife attacks.

Read the label on the armor panel inside the vest to find out if it's designed to protect against knife attacks. If you believe your greatest threat could come from a knife or some type of blade like a box cutter, you should buy a stab-resistant vest rather than a typical bulletproof vest.

For example, if you work in a jail or prison setting as a Corrections Officer, you have greater odds of being stabbed or slashed by an inmate than you have of being shot.

If you're not sure which type of threat you are most likely to face you could always consider buying combination armor. This would protect you against knives as well as bullets.

7. Understand the distinction between "in-conjunction" and "stand-alone" body armor.

Police officers often wear soft body armor beneath their uniform, which protects against handguns. But, to protect against rifle rounds a hard plate needs to be added. This is what is called "in-conjunction body armor." Worn together they can defeat the higher threat. For it to be effective, the in-conjunction hard armor plate has to be worn with soft body armor. Preferably the same soft armor it was originally tested with.

When you are wearing a "stand-alone armor plate," you need not to wear additional armor under it. However, many police officers routinely wear these in their carrier vest for the sake of convenience. Wearing soft armor under you stand-alone armor plate will also lower blunt trauma values in case you are being hit by a bullet.

8. Think about how much mobility you'll need.

With each increase in protection level the more cumbersome and heavier the vest becomes. If your priority is to have the ability to move around quickly, you may want to consider a Level II or IIA, which are fairly lightweight. If you get something heavier, it will be more difficult to move around in.

9. Before making your purchase, try your vest on and move around a bit.

You want to feel comfortable when wearing your ballistic armor so you need to make sure that it doesn't fit too tightly and that it isn't too loose either. If it seems too heavy or bulky and prevents you from moving your arms, keep looking so that you end up with a vest that fits better.

Never wear someone else's vest because it will not fit you properly and therefore will not provide the protection you need.

If you are buying online, make sure the vendor has a guaranteed replacement or return policy so if it doesn't fit properly you can just send it back.

10. Make sure you have the right fit and coverage.

Good protective body armor should cover four specific areas of the torso: the front, the back and both sides. Personnel trained by the body armor's manufacturer can help you to get the correct fit. Make sure you get measured properly when you're selecting your body armor. It should fit snuggly without hampering your movement.

It should not ride up so that it gets into your throat area. It should never impede access to your duty belt when you're squatting, bending or sitting. Never put on a vest belonging to someone else. It will not fit you properly and therefore will not provide the protection you need.