

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Officer Down:  
Falling Heroes**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the past several years, there are many areas of concern about working the streets of Texas. The state of Texas has lost numerous officers to violence on the streets due to improper body armor, out dated body armor, or not wearing body armor.

The purpose of the research is to study the effectiveness of body armor and how it assists officers on the streets and save lives. The research will address the benefits of wearing protective body armor compared to the possible down falls of not wearing protective body armor.

The researcher has collected data from within the state of Texas as well as research from across the United State to find the best possible studies that can be accumulated to obtain a general understanding of what today's law enforcement officers have in the way of body armor. Additionally, studies are examined to identify what it takes to stay ahead of the latest ways of trying to murder police officers.

This research has found that the state of Texas is a top leader in the nation for officer fatalities and that most of the departments throughout Texas are buying the officers' body armor. Research has also shown that older and out-dated body armor is handed down from larger departments to smaller departments due to budgets restraints.

This study proposes that officers, city and county administrators, and state lawmakers can benefit from the research and asserts that a small amount of money spent on body armor for officers can insure their safety.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the career of law enforcement there are many facts out there to protect an officer and get that officer home after a shift is complete. People often think that keeping a clean and functioning weapon, having a pre-shift vehicle inspection and knowing the streets in the officer's designated area will insure an officer's safety. However, there is not much thought put into the protective vest that is or should be worn when an officer is out protecting and serving.

One of the most valuable pieces of equipment an officer can buy is often overlooked and the officer is sometimes shunned for wearing it. In the past fifteen years, the technology in body armor has surpassed what officers wore in earlier days. Body armor came to the scene when the Japanese used woven silk back in the medieval times. The first reported law enforcement officer killed in the United States was New York deputy sheriff Issac Smith in 1792. It was not until the early 1900's that the United States began to think about making body armor. The first patent was issued in 1919, but with the invention of higher powered ammunition, the known vest of today came around in the late 1960's. (NIJ Guide, 2002).

The purpose of this research is to study the effectiveness of wearing proper body armor and examine the need to have more funds allocated to law enforcement departments for the maintenance and proper upkeep of protective body armor. Included in this research are results from across the state of Texas and several states outside of Texas on the wearing of body armor, exposing the trends of law enforcement departments' procedures regarding the utilization of body armor.

For the method of inquiry, the researcher sent out surveys throughout the State of Texas and to states around the United States. The research proposes to find out if the law enforcement profession in Texas uses body armor more readily than officers in other states. The study will verify to see if body armor equipment is bought or paid for by the officer or if weather has any correlation to an officer's decision to wear or not wear body armor.

The intended outcome of this research is to establish why officers are being killed in the line of duty throughout our nation and consider whether or not body armor plays any role in saving an officer's life. After the surveys are returned the researcher will focus on the Texas police officers killed in the line of duty and expose whether or not they were wearing body armor. The researcher intends to provide information to assist officers in the decision towards wearing body armor protection as part of their daily routine.

The researcher believes that wearing body armor is not the only benefactor to coming home from the end of a shift. Some consider the idea that body armor can give an officer a false sense of security and make the officer do things he or she would not do if they were not wearing the body armor. Others suggest that body armor gives officers a sense of protection that enables them to go into the red zone without second thought. Not all officers killed in the line of duty could have been saved by body armor. With the conclusion of this study the researcher hopes to encourage all Texas peace officers to wear their body armor.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researchers are studying the effects of body armor used in the many areas of law enforcement and considers whether or not body armor save an officers' life. Protective body armor has been responsible for saving more than 2,700 lives since its introduction more than thirty years ago. Officers are still being murdered on the streets of Texas as we speak. Police officers are a constant target by criminals and terrorists daily and they need every resource available to attempt to protect them. The notion that wearing body armor alone will save officers is a misleading statement, but the facts are prevalent stating that wearing body armor does save lives.

Officers who do not wear body armor increase their risk of being killed in the line of duty by hand guns by fourteen times compared to officer's who wear their body armor. Facts are showing that just because you wear body armor improves your chance for making it through a shift on the streets. Failure to wear body armor places you and your partners in harms way, it's common knowledge you cannot respond to call if you are injured and not wearing body armor could lead to injury if not death. (Policeone.Com, 2005).

While the companies making body armor have not seen many new standards and regulations, there have been significant revisions and additions to many of the existing standards for bullet proofing. Trying to stay on top of the criminal elements is a constant struggle. With many benefits to assure officer safety with higher powered weapons, better less then force items that are on today's market, for example Taser guns research needs to keep the body armor advances steps above the trend that it is happening now. (marketresearch.com, 2002).

Over the past twenty years, new materials and fabrics have been introduced. These new materials have made the wearing of body armor a little more comfortable for officers. Body armor manufactures have also made a number of advances in the design technology resulting in the body armor with increased ballistic protection. (Department of Justice, 2001).

Through continued research they have found that not all body armor is made the same. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott has found problems with certain types of material found in the body armor put out by a Japanese company Toyobo and sold under the Second Chance body armor company. These vests are made of a material called "Zylon" and they break down faster than the standard vest material known as "Kevlar". The suit alleges that the body armor with 100 percent Zylon poses a possible life threatening hazard to those wearing them.

Texas Attorney General Abbott stated in a report on the suit "There is an unacceptable risk thousands of Texas peace officers who might be wearing Zylon vests". In September 2003, Second Chance did finally warn its customers that the vest containing Zylon might not be up to par. After the fact of two officers were shot, one in Pennsylvania who was seriously injured and the other from California who was killed in the line of duty. Second Chance offered free upgrades by inserting non-zylon material in front of the Zylon material but would not offer a refund on the vest. (oag.state.tx.us., 2004).

Research shows that when asked the question of what should an officer wear as far as the protection level you should check data from shootings in your area. Check crime scenes and see what kind of weapons are being fired in your neighborhoods and

what types of weapons are being recovered from crime scenes and taken off of suspects. U.C.R. reports show that one and six officers are killed with their own weapon, so consider that you might want to protect yourself from the caliber of ammunition that you carry on a daily basis.

New research shows that a frangible bullet is more likely to penetrate your body armor. A frangible bullet is usually used for training purposes to reduce the lead hazards on firing ranges. But do to the fact that these bullets are made from composites of hybrid material either pressed together at a high pressure or glued together. They break up into smaller pieces when they make contact and they have been found to break through body armor. (justnet.org, 2003).

The National Institute of Justice has asked the Office of Law Enforcement Standards to do more research into the new discovery regarding body armor and further suggests that frangible bullets represent an unconventional threat to body armor when compared to the traditional lead based bullets.

This research demonstrates that wearing of body armor is important. The shift that an officer works also has an effect on his or her likely hood of being shot. Uniform crime reports show that more officers are murdered between the hours of 8:01 pm and 10:00 pm, with the fewest being slain after 2:00 am until 8:00 am. The research also shows that more officers are murdered on Fridays and the fewest are murdered on Sundays. Further research shows that October has a slight lead over April and August with November having the fewest number of officer casualties. Consequently, an officer's shift work, time of duty and the month he or she is working nights or days has an effect on the officer if his shift is completed or not.

Attorney General John Ashcroft states “the safety of our nation’s law enforcement officers is of the utmost importance, criminals with weapons pose a constant threat to our law enforcement officers” and he also encourages all law enforcement officer’s to wear body armor for their own protection. (Attorney General Ashcroft, press release, USDOJ.GOV, 2003).

The U.C.R. research shows that the South has more officer deaths compared to the rest of the nation, excluding the terrorist attack on our nation that elevated the numbers on the east coast. Since the inception of this research paper, Texas has lost 18 police officers in the line of duty and of those 18, five officer casualties were caused by gunfire.

Out of the seventy-nine officers killed in the line of duty this year, thirty-one of them have been from gunfire. (odmp.org, 2005). With the numbers of officer fatalities being at an all time high, it is disconcerting that law enforcement officers elect not to wear their body armor. Various research illustrates that wearing of body armor will increase an officer’s safety and with the appropriate funding, it should be a basic part of all officers’ uniforms and not an option at the officer’s expense.

A policy should be in place asserting that if a department purchases an officer’s body armor, it should be mandatory for that officer to wear it. This mandatory implementation of departmental policies enforcing the use of body armor as a part of an officer’s uniform would assist in protecting officers on the street and eliminate the negative attitude that only cowards and wimps wear body armor.

Our nation has had over 17,000 thousand officers killed in the line of duty. Updated training and money in the budgets (of law enforcement agencies) for the

purchase of body armor can assist in keeping officers alive. The researcher recommends that police departments support the buying and wearing of protective body armor.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Research will be computed to see if there is a distinct correlation between officers in the State of Texas wearing body armor with specific consideration as to whether or not officers wear their body armor at all times or only when they know they are about to be in a dangerous place or situation.

The research will address whether or not weather plays a role in an officer's choice to wear protective body armor. Questions regarding: departmental policies being in place requiring that protective gear be worn, whether or not being a supervisor and not being on the street plays a role in the choice an officer makes to wear or not to wear a bullet proof vest, officer's who work the night shift as opposed to the day shift and how schedules affect each officer's choice to wear body armor, and finally, the cost of protective body armor will be addressed in the research.

The research should demonstrate that with proper policy and funding, the wearing of body armor should increase the safety of Texas peace officers. After officers have been fitted for body armor and have the knowledge that this research should provide, the author hopes the benefits of wearing protective body armor will positively inform an officer's decision to wear their bullet proof vests and subsequent protective gear.

With all of the advances made regarding protective body armor, officers should have no reason not to wear body armor. The research over the past ten years will show

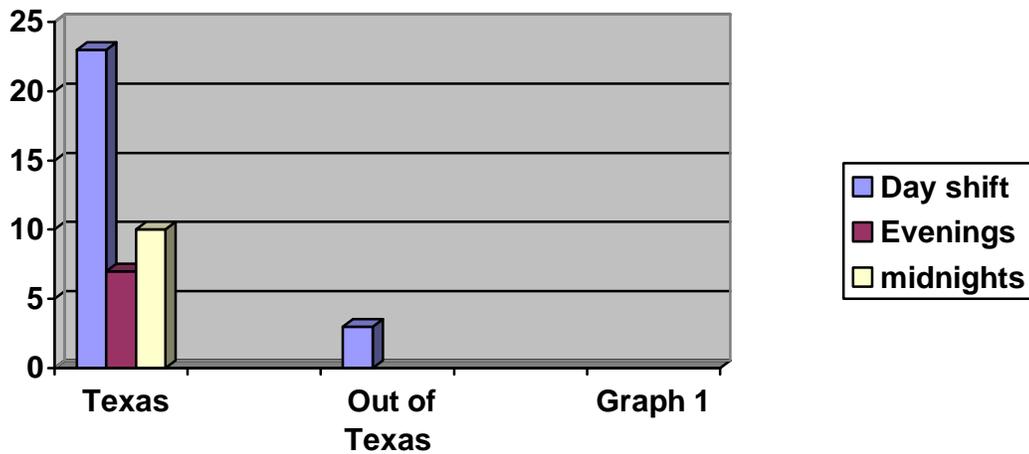
administrators the facts that will lead their departments into the future and help officers stay ahead of the criminals they are subjected to every day.

The research will send out thirty surveys throughout the state of Texas and have all of them returned for the purpose of finding out what other departments in the state do regarding the use of body armor. Research will be sent to ten states outside the state of Texas to see what commonalities might exist between Texas and other states regarding the utilization of protective gear among police officers. The researcher would like to see if the weather plays an important part in the wearing of protective body armor or if having the department pay for an officer's body armor will invite officer's to wear their body armor.

## **FINDINGS**

Through research it should be evident that though the survey is not a scientific survey, and the results are solely reliable on the accuracy of the information supplied, only 3 out of ten *out-of-state* surveys were returned. The researcher had a 100 percent return rate on state agencies and only a 30 percent return rate with similar results throughout. The information was calculated and put into graphs to show the results of several questions on the survey and further demonstrate how they compare to the states that were returned.

The findings from the survey show the following results from within the state of Texas and officers from North Little Rock, Arkansas, Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Twin Falls, Idaho police departments on their shift assignments. Of the forty-three returned (see graph 1), the majority of the officers surveyed work the day shift.

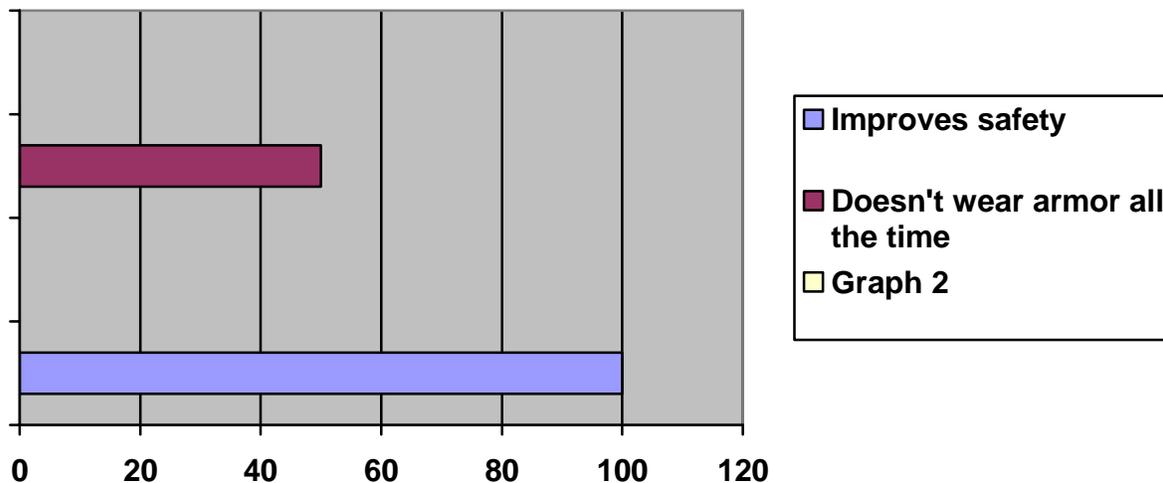


With the majority of the surveys coming from within the state of Texas, the research on the weather being a factor is almost irrelevant to the wearing of body armor in Texas as compared to the other states. For instance, spring reported the average weather to be 78.3 degrees with the coolest days being reported as 50 degrees and the warmest days being reported as 90 degrees. The next reported average was summer as being 95 degrees, with the coolest days being recorded at 72 and the hottest days being reported as 110 degrees. Fall is the next category having the average temperature of 70.6 degrees, with the lowest temperatures being reported as 55 degrees and the warmest temperatures being 85 degrees. The winter average temperature recorded on the Texas surveys was 47.6 degrees, with the lowest temperatures being 10 degrees and the warmest being recorded as 70 degrees. The three *out-of-state* surveys returned show the average weather to be close to the Texas results with spring being 77.5 degrees average, summer being 94 degrees on average, fall being 70 degrees on average and winter being 50 degrees on average. Comparing the large state of Texas with the other did not prove whether or not climate or weather

had any factor to body armor being worn by officers in warmer states as compared to colder states.

The next part of the survey considered an officer's rank and their assignments at the department in which they work for. The following results will demonstrate the findings from both the state of Texas and the other states that replied. Out of the forty surveys returned from Texas peace officers and the three from the other states, the same results are evident. In Texas there were two patrol officers, 17 sergeants, 12 Lieutenants, five captains, one Assistant/Deputy Chief, and three Chiefs of police. From *out-of-state* there was a Patrol officer, a Sergeant, and a Captain. All officers worked many areas of their department. For example, there were 18 officers working the patrol division, three working the gangs/narcotics division, five officers working the investigator area, three working the K-9 division, one working the support area of their facility, and 12 supervisors working in certain areas within their department.

With the reported facts from the U.C.R. asserting that a large number of officers are killed from not wearing their body armor, the following graph will confirm the educated guess that brought forth an answer to the question addressing how many officer's wear their vest based on shift assignments considering the shifts available. The next graph compares the officers' answers to the question which addresses whether or not they feel that body armor improves their safety and how many of these officers actually wear their body armor while they are on duty.



As demonstrated in the graph, the officers surveyed inferred that wearing body armor improves their safety on the street, but only half of the officers surveyed decided to wear their armor. Wearing vest shows to be a proven safety factor in law enforcement.

## CONCLUSION

The research examined whether or not officers felt that wearing a bullet-proof vest provides a false sense of security and further questioned whether or not body armor is the most important, overlooked piece of equipment in law enforcement. The non-scientific research demonstrates that officers believe that body armor is very important. In fact, one-hundred percent of the officers surveyed reporting that they felt like body armor improved their safety.

However, when officers were asked if they wear their body armor daily, only half of the officers responded yes. Many of these officers work inside a building and given this, they might feel a false sense of security for not answering calls in the field. Ideally,

if the proper information on this topic is spread around the state, the number of officers being killed in the line of duty will greatly decrease. The researcher does not feel that older officers wear protective body armor due to their macho belief system regarding law enforcement. If the image of law enforcement does not change and officers continue to remain targets on the street that they protect, officer fatalities might continue to grow.

With the available funds out there by federal grants, all officers should be fitted and kept up-to-date regarding their protective body armor. The researcher believes that the more knowledge that is put out to the departments on this topic, the better chances there will be of law enforcement officers who will decide to begin or continue to wear body armor.

In closing the author believes that the research demonstrates that all officers are concerned with their safety. Additionally, most departments are buying protective vests for their officers. All of the data collected tends to show that officers are wearing the body armor. The research reported that the temperature does not figure into whether officers wear their vests, but officers do only elect to wear their vest half of the time they are on-duty, which could cause serious problems and fatalities.

The author recognizes that many officers wearing vests have been killed by head shots and lower extremities shots, so wearing body armor is not going to prevent all chances for fatalities, but wearing protective gear could reduce the number of injuries or casualties. Until our nation realizes the dangers that are put on the shoulders of protecting and serving the public, officers will still be killed in the line of duty.

The first step to prevention is knowledge, which is the aim of this research. The researcher hopes that the points covered and discovered in this research can make a difference in an officer's life. Fallen heroes will not stop until our government can get officers the help and assistance they need and make sure that all officers are safe at their places of employment, which serves the community at large.

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