Body Armor

1012.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for the proper issuance, use, care and maintenance of body armor.

1012.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office to maximize officer safety through the use of body armor, in combination with prescribed safety procedures. While body armor provides a significant level of protection, it is not a substitute for the observance of officer safety procedures.

1012.3 ISSUANCE

The Administrative Division Commander shall ensure that body armor is issued to all deputies and that, when issued, the body armor meets or exceeds the standards of the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

Body armor shall be issued when a deputy begins service at the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office and shall be replaced when it becomes expired, worn or damaged to the point that its effectiveness or functionality has been compromised.

The Sheriff may authorize issuance of body armor to uniformed and professional staff members whose jobs may make wearing of body armor advisable.

(a) Measurement and fitting

1. Deputies shall report for body armor measurements in their duty uniform with their assigned gun belt and normal duty equipment. Measurements shall not be taken while a Deputy is wearing street clothes.
2. A Police Services employee trained in body armor fitting and adjustment shall oversee the fitting. The employee shall verify the position and fit of the armor with the Deputy's uniform and duty equipment in place.

(b) Receipt and Issuance

1. Upon receipt of new body armor, Police Services shall record the date received and the manufacturer's expiration or suggested replacement date. Police Services shall install all issued panels in the outer carrier and insert any issued plates before scheduling the Deputy's fitting.
2. Police Services shall contact the Deputy and schedule delivery at Police Services. The Deputy shall report in duty uniform with their assigned gun belt and normal duty equipment.
3. Before the Deputy takes possession, the Deputy shall try on the assembled armor in the presence of a trained Police Services employee. That employee shall check its fit, make necessary adjustments, and explain how the Deputy should adjust and wear it.

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4. Police Services shall document the fitting and issuance on a SMCSO Form 14, signed by the Deputy and Initialed by the Police Services employee. The form 14 will include:
    (a) The Deputy's name and ID Number
    (b) Vest make, model, size, and serial or identifying numbers for the panels and any issued plates
    (c) Date Police Services received the armor and date it was issued
    (d) Manufacturer's expiration or suggested replacement date
5. If a deficiency is identified, Police Services shall document it, notify the vendor in a timely manner and no later than 30 calendar days after Police Services received the armor, and retain the vendor correspondence with the issuance record. Police Services shall track the correction through resolution. Armor that does not fit properly or otherwise fails issuance requirements shall not be issued for operational use.
6. If no deficiency is identified, Police Services shall mark "No deficiencies noted" on the Form 14 before obtaining signatures.
7. If the Deputy has any problems or deficiencies once the vest is worn in the field, the Deputy is responsible for notifying their supervisor and Police Services, in writing, within 7 days of the vest being issued.

(c) Replacement of Body Armor

1. The Sheriff's Office shall replace a Deputy's protective body armor before the manufacturer's expiration or suggested replacement date. Police Services shall maintain records of the armor issued to each Deputy, including its manufacturer's expiration or suggested replacement date, and initiate replacement sufficiently in advance of that date.
2. A Deputy who discovers that issued armor is approaching or has reached its manufacturer's expiration or suggested replacement date shall promptly notify their supervisor and Police Services. A Deputy whose armor has reached that date shall be assigned to administrative duties until compliant replacement armor is issued.
3. If a Deputy's armor has not been replaced by the 31st day after its manufacturer's expiration or suggested replacement date, the Administrative Division Commander shall promptly notify the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission and document the notification.

1012.3.1 USE

Generally, the required use of body armor is subject to the following:

(a) Members shall only wear office-approved body armor.

(b) Members shall wear body armor any time they are in a situation where they could reasonably be expected to take enforcement action.

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(c) Members are not required to wear body armor when they are functioning primarily in an administrative or support capacity and would not reasonably be expected to take enforcement action. However, when that duty transitions to a field responsibility, the wearing of the body armor shall be donned as soon as practical.

(d) Deputies may be excused from wearing body armor when they are involved in undercover or plainclothes work that a supervisor determines could be compromised by wearing body armor, or when a supervisor determines that other circumstances make it inappropriate to mandate wearing body armor.

(e) Personnel wearing the class C or D uniform are permitted to wear their agency-issued body armor in the Outer Carrier.

Refer to Policy 1023.5 for guidelines on wearing the Outer Carrier vest.

1012.3.2 INSPECTION

Supervisors should ensure through routine observation and periodic documented inspections that body armor is worn and maintained in accordance with this policy.

Annual inspections of body armor should be conducted by a person trained to perform the inspection for fit, cleanliness and signs of damage, abuse and wear.

1012.3.3 CARE AND MAINTENANCE

The required care and maintenance of body armor is subject to the following:

(a) Members are responsible for inspecting their body armor for signs of damage, wear and cleanliness at the start of each shift. Unserviceable body armor shall be reported to the supervisor.

(b) Members are responsible for the proper storage of their body armor. Body armor should not be stored for an extended period of time in an area where environmental conditions (e.g., temperature, light, humidity) could potentially degrade its effectiveness.

(c) Members are responsible for the care and cleaning of their body armor pursuant to the manufacturer's care instructions.

1. Body armor should not be exposed to any cleaning agents or methods not specifically recommended by the manufacturer.

2. Failure to follow manufacturer's care instructions may damage the ballistic performance capabilities of the body armor. If care instructions for the body armor cannot be located, the manufacturer should be contacted to request the instructions.

(d) Body armor should be replaced in accordance with the manufacturer's recommended replacement schedule, or when its effectiveness or functionality has been compromised.

1012.4 ARMORER RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of the Armorer include, but are not limited to:

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(a) Monitoring technological advances in the body armor industry for any appropriate changes to office-approved body armor.

(b) Assessing the current level of weapons and ammunition utilized by the public and the suitability of approved body armor to protect against those threats.

(c) Educating deputies about the safety benefits of wearing body armor.

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