



Department of Justice



Office of Justice Programs

For immediate release
March 11, 2004

Office of Justice Programs
www.ojp.usdoj.gov

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE HOLDS SUMMIT AS PART OF BODY ARMOR SAFETY INITIATIVE

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As part of the Justice Department’s Body Armor Safety Initiative, the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) today convened a summit to address the reliability of body armor used by law enforcement personnel and to examine the future of bullet-resistant technology and testing. In November 2003, Attorney General John Ashcroft called on the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the research, development and evaluation arm of the Justice Department and a sub-agency of OJP, immediately to initiate examination of Zylon-based bullet-resistant vests, both new and used, and to review NIJ’s existing certification process. The Attorney General also directed OJP to convene a summit with representatives of federal, state and local law enforcement; law enforcement associations; manufacturers of bullet-resistant fabric and equipment; and standards and testing organizations, to review the information available from NIJ’s preliminary examination.

“The safety of our nation’s law enforcement officers is of the utmost importance to the Justice Department, and we are committed to working to ensure that law enforcement has the best equipment available,” said Assistant Attorney General Deborah Daniels. “We are developing scientific evidence that will help law enforcement make reasoned decisions about the relative safety of various types of protective equipment. In the meantime, we continue to encourage law enforcement to wear bullet-resistant body armor for their protection.” Daniels added that the lives of more than 2,700 law enforcement officers have been saved by the use of bullet-resistant body armor over the past 30 years.

At the direction of Attorney General John Ashcroft, OJP has taken the following actions:

- **Examination and Report:** OJP initiated an examination of body armor, directed by NIJ. Preliminary testing of Zylon-based bullet-resistant vests (both new and used) is being conducted by the Department of Commerce’s National Institute of Standards and Technology (“NIST”). “Upgrade kits” provided by manufacturers to retrofit Zylon-based bullet-resistant vests will be included in the study. A report on the status of NIJ’s preliminary examination of body armor has been sent to the Attorney General and is available on the OJP web site at <http://vests.ojp.gov>. The report demonstrates a clear need for more thorough testing of multiple brands of body armor.

The first phase of the examination included ballistic tests on a very limited sample of used Zylon vests that have been heavily worn or exposed to adverse conditions in the field. The preliminary test results indicate that there may be degradation occurring in the ballistic performance of used Zylon-based armors. Only a small number of vests have been tested so far; therefore, it is not possible to make any definitive conclusions about specific manufacturers, models, service life, or geographical region at this time.

A second examination phase will include a thorough analysis of a much larger sampling of armors from various climatic regions, age categories, and manufacturers, to provide comprehensive scientific findings. This testing will seek to determine whether Zylon-based armor degrade, the general extent of the degradation, and what factors may be causing the degradation. The Department of Justice's testing period will continue through 2004. During this time, NIJ will continue to review the existing process by which newly manufactured bullet-resistant vests are certified to determine whether the process should be modified.

- Information: Up-to-date information about bullet-resistant armor, including information from NIJ's examination, research and testing and other relevant information will be provided on the website of OJP's Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program (<http://vests.ojp.gov>).
- Replacement: OJP has continued to work with state and local law enforcement agencies that have purchased Zylon-based bullet resistant armor to ensure they are fully aware of all information available about the product. Law enforcement agencies who wish to replace their Zylon armor before the end of the warranty period can apply for additional funding from the Bulletproof Vest Partnership program.

OJP will continue to fulfill the Attorney General's commitment to provide additional and updated information to the field concerning body armor and the testing program through its website, technology centers, publications, and meetings with law enforcement stakeholder organizations.

###