



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

National Institute of Justice

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE STATEMENT REGARDING BODY ARMOR SAFETY INITIATIVE

At the direction of Attorney General John Ashcroft, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has implemented an initiative to address the reliability of body armor used by law enforcement personnel and to examine the future of bullet-resistant technology and testing.

NIJ is the research, development, and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice and has worked in collaboration with the law enforcement community for more than 25 years to develop performance standards and conduct testing of bullet-resistant armor to ensure officer safety. More than 2,700 officers' lives have been saved as a result of this life saving product.

While bullet-resistant body armor has an outstanding safety record in protecting officers from ballistic threats and other types of injuries, a police officer in Forest Hills, Pennsylvania, was shot and seriously injured this summer when a bullet penetrated his Second Chance Ultima® vest made of Zylon®. The Forest Hills incident is the first case reported to NIJ in which NIJ-compliant body armor appears to have failed to prevent a bullet from penetrating armor that was designed to defeat such bullets.

As a result of the Forest Hills shooting, NIJ along with its Office of Law Enforcement Standards initiated a comprehensive examination to help determine the cause of the body armor failure. NIJ is also reviewing information provided in two additional shootings in Oceanside, California, and Ravalli County, Montana, to help determine if a failure of NIJ-compliant armor occurred.

NIJ is examining the Forest Hills incident and looking at the characteristics of the weapon, bullet, ammunition, and ballistic materials. The preliminary findings show a significant reduction in the yarn strength in the Forest Hills armor when compared to NIJ-compliant armor and the new armor Second Chance provided to support the review.

Throughout the review, the Forest Hills police department and crime laboratory, Second Chance, and Toyobo Co., Ltd. (the maker of Zylon®) have fully cooperated with NIJ. Statements from Second Chance (www.secondchance.com/ultima.asp) and Toyobo (www.toyobo.co.jp/e/seihin/kc/pbo/menu/fra_menu_en.htm) can be found at their respective web sites. NIJ hopes to complete its review of the Forest Hills incident within the next few months. At the completion of this examination, NIJ will issue a statement concerning the cause of the armor failure.

In conjunction with this study, NIJ is embarking on a multi-phase, parallel effort that will include ballistic testing of both new and used Zylon®-based armor; ballistic testing of an upgrade kit designed by Second Chance Body Armor Inc., to supplement the performance of their Zylon®-based armor models; and accelerated research into the effects of aging on the ballistic performance of body armor. The results of these scientific studies will be communicated as rapidly as possible to the law enforcement community and to the public.

In the meantime, we urge public safety and procurement officials to review the facts known in making responsible decisions concerning armor replacement. We urge officers to wear body armor even if it contains Zylon®, as an officer's risk of fatality is 14 times greater when not wearing body armor.

Additional information about the Attorney General's Safety Initiative will be posted at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ocpa>.