

BODY ARMOUR – WHY?



by Robert Kaiser, CEO of PPSS Group

*Above image: PPSS Body Armour worn by UK hospital security guard

In an ever changing world, where a lack of respect and lack of discipline are the order of the day, appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as [bullet resistant vests](#) or [stab resistant vests](#) and similar types of body armour have become an essential piece of equipment for many security and other domestic frontline professionals.

We all need to understand that a lack of adequate safety measures can put an individual at unnecessary risk, and cause unacceptable injury or harm... that's a matter of fact and equally of relevance to those professionals protecting us against foreign threats from hostile countries far away – just as much as to those professionals engaging with dangerous members of the public just around the corner from where we might live.

We may prefer to close our eyes and not accept reality, but body armour has regrettably become a real necessity within a number of homeland security agencies and even domestic frontline professions.

The United Kingdom's Health and Safety Laboratory conducted a number of [case studies](#) about 10 years ago, and approached over 400 organisations of various sizes and across a range of different occupations.

Detailed questionnaires were sent and interviews were conducted with the selected organisations and the information which they provided formed the basis of these widely respected case studies. The outcome is of great relevance to the question: 'Body Armour – Why?'

Highlighted Risk Areas

- Visiting people in their home or office to enforce laws and regulations, police the system or being the bearer of bad news increases the level of risk and subsequently the need for body armour or stab resistant vests.
- Certain geographical areas or trouble spots are high risk, such as poor or run down council estates or high crime level areas.
- Dealing with certain high risk individuals – such as potentially violent or aggressive members of the public, drug users or dealers.
- Dealing with extremely frustrated and disappointed customers (e.g. customers extremely unhappy with the service your or your partner organisation has provided)
- Evicting people from their home.
- Dealing with individuals expressing extreme religious or political views.
- Securing or protecting property, events or people is a professional responsibility that certainly warrants the need for body armour or stab vests.
- Enforcing the law

Any of the above points should in itself be reason enough to at least consider the issue of body armour – but I could highlight many more reasons, making a decision not to issue potentially life saving PPE even more controversial.

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Corporate manslaughter and corporate homicide laws as well as health & safety regulations have been rewritten in countries around the world, in order to protect those who serve and risk their lives for others. The cost of facing potential legal action after a fatal or non-fatal incident and the real cost of injured employees taking time off would outweigh the one-off cost of body armour. Assaults on personnel who are not wearing body armour or other types of protective clothing also create bad publicity for the Authority concerned, not to mention the welfare of the person involved and operational problems resulting from the injured staff being unable to work.

The most popular argument against body armour I have personally come across is the concern about how it might be seen by the public when frontline employees start walking around in body armour. Well, I do understand that 'perception' is one of the most important issues within personal safety,

For me, domestic frontline employees dealing with the public should be doing their utmost to express themselves as peaceful ambassadors within their line of work using excellent communication skills (...which is not always reality we will all agree I guess). COVERT Stab Resistant Vests allow them to use their positive personality, diplomacy and negotiation skills to defuse a situation, whilst still being protected.

However, we do understand that certain professionals e.g. Police, Border Control, Immigration, Customs, Parking Enforcement, Trading Standards or Licensing Enforcement Officers need to be seen as 'Authority' or visual deterrent... hence many within these type of organisations prefer to wear OVERT Stab Resistant Vests or even HI VIZ OVERT Stab Resistant Vests which have recently become the public sector's first choice.

Risk Assessments & Body Armour

Regardless of the outcome of any common risk assessment, the fact of the matter is that there is always an 'unknown' level of risk due to unforeseen circumstances. Ordinary risk assessments might often

PPSS Overt Stab Resistant Vests offer truly outstanding protection from blunt force trauma related injuries, often the result of a punch, kick or blow of a blunt object.

conclude in the verdict of 'low risk', however these often fairly basic risk assessments are based on technical facts or 'on-hand information' only, and as much as I appreciate them, they often do not go beyond these 'available facts'.

A risk assessment dealing with the activity of an enforcement professional having to enter someone else's property or deal with potentially 'unhappy' and frustrated or aggressive customers or clients can in my opinion, never ever result in low risk. The moment such professional walks through someone's door or deals with often unfamiliar members of the public at another location, one can simply not know who else will be in the house or who else might enter the house at a later point. What activities have taken place prior to your visit? Who else might be going to interfere or engage in your conversation or argument at a later point? All of these issues and questions must have an impact when discussing operational risks, threats and duties and the potential issuing of stab resistant or bullet resistant vests.

Here in the UK it is as follows:*

Employers are required to make a "suitable and sufficient" assessment of the risks involved in their business operations.

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When conducting the risk assessment the employer is required to consider “reasonably foreseeable” risks – and these risks would include the possibility of an employee in a confrontational role being assaulted.

Employers are obliged to use “safe systems of work” which is why they must first do a risk assessment. If the risk assessment identifies the possibility of being stabbed as a significant risk then control measures must be designed into the safe system of work to either eliminate or minimise this risk.

If, having considered all potential management techniques, the risk of being stabbed cannot be reduced below a significant level then the employer should consider the use of body armour – and will have to meet the cost of such equipment.

*Above bullet points courtesy of Andy Farrall, Health & Safety Specialist

Good question...

What would you do if you were driving a car and your petrol light comes on, indicating you only have a small amount of petrol left?

Would you start thinking: Will I make it home or not? Some people would be willing to take the risk in this situation. In the workplace though, in my view, it is the duty of the employer to not allow their employees to take unknown risks on their own accord without the provision of equipment and training to protect them should they make a mistake in their own judgement.

‘Better safe than sorry’ and ‘Prevention is better than cure’ are two great sayings, making more sense within corporate health & safety than anywhere else. I hope you would stop and get some fuel, because you want to be on the safe side. You might have made it, but you didn’t want to take that risk.

The bottom line is you cannot afford to break down. The fact that some professional’s activity involves a rather ‘unknown risk’ must urge key decision makers to remain at least open minded when it comes to body armour, **stab resistant armor**, body worn video solutions or additional training that can be made available.

PPSS Hi Viz Overt Stab Resistant Vests have become the public sector’s first choice of body armour because they offer exceptional protection from all types of edged weapons, but they also create an image of ‘being approachable’.

‘Seat Belt’ Comparison

Recommending body armour does not mean we suggest you are in danger and neither does it mean you should get paranoid or scared 24 hours a day. I simply say that you will have a higher chance of remaining unharmed in the unlikely, but nevertheless possible, case of something going wrong. Wearing personal protective equipment can be compared to wearing a seat belt when driving a car. We do not put the seat belt on because we believe we are going to have an accident today. We are simply acknowledging the fact that there is an exceptionally small chance that we might crash. Yet, if this chance becomes reality, you have increased the chance of survival by wearing a seat belt.

We at UK headquartered **PPSS Group** are globally respected and renowned experts in body armour for civil and homeland security agencies as well as other domestic frontline services, such as paramedics, hospital security, brand protection, investigation teams, civil enforcement teams and public transport professionals.

Should you ever have any questions in reference to body armour, then please do not hesitate to contact my teams – and in the strictest of confidence they will help you to the best of their ability.