

Body Armor Safety Information for the Security Industry

By Anthony Gavin McGrath, Safeguard Armor

The security industry encompasses a wide range of sectors, with personnel providing protection in settings as diverse as shopping malls and open seas. Many of us depend on security professionals to feel safe, whether we work in a store with a history of shoplifting or at a bar attracting the occasional aggressive drunk—they help us to go about our business knowing a trained individual, or team, is nearby if help is needed.

However, regardless of which sector of the industry employing security personnel, they may face certain risks from time to time. To stay as safe as possible, and to perform at the best of their abilities, they need the best training for all possible situations, as well as the right equipment. Depending on the level of threats security professionals may face, this equipment will vary: personnel based in shopping malls (for example) may carry handcuffs and a handgun, while those guarding cargo vessels in [piracy-prone seas may use automatic weapons](#).

One item of equipment required by many security personnel, across all sectors, is body armor. Although it is produced in a wide range of types, all armor is manufactured for a shared reason: Protecting the wearer's vital organs from harm, whether this is inflicted with a bullet, a blade or an improvised weapon. While working in a shopping center in an affluent area may not pose the same risks as providing close protection to a vulnerable VIP, preparation is key: Anyone armed with a gun should wear armor, in case of an accident or an attacker seizing control of their weapon. Numerous factors affect which type of body armor security personnel should wear, and, in this guide, we'll help you to understand which protective vest will suit you best.



Finding the Best Vest: Body Armor by Type

Manufacturers produce body armor to protect wearers against multiple threats, at various levels. Each vest is tested by the [U.S. National Institute of Justice](#), which assigns a rating based on the amount of protection it offers. These cover vests offering protection across three main areas: ballistic, edged blade and spike. To understand the different types a little better, let's take a look at each in turn.

Ballistic

The current standard used to guide buyers features five levels: IIA, II, IIIA, III, and IV. These cover a wide range of weaponry from the more [common handguns to high-caliber rifles](#). Level IIA vests offer protection against lower-velocity 9mm rounds (hitting with an impact-speed of 373 m/s) as well as .40 S&W bullets. Level II armor has enough stopping power to defend against 9mm rounds with a velocity of 398 m/s, and .357 Magnum bullets. Level IIIA vests are designed to stop .357 SIG bullets, as well as .44 Magnum rounds. Vests at these three levels are classed as soft armors, given their more flexible construction.

Hard armors are designed to offer protection from more heavy-duty firearms. Level III vests are strong enough to stop 7.62mm rifle bullets, while those at level IV feature ballistic plates (as well as Kevlar) to stop armor-piercing rounds of the .30-06 type. These are



typically only likely to be needed in extreme situations, such as providing personal security in a hostile environment, or guarding a cargo vessel vulnerable to attack from heavily armed pirates. For most security applications, a soft armor bulletproof vest like the ones you can see on safeguardclothing.com, should provide enough protection. It should always, at least, be of a level high enough to stop the wearer's own ammunition.

Edged Blade

The stab vest may be one of the most commonly used forms of protective clothing among security professionals. The majority of individuals providing security services—whether at the doors of a popular bar or patrolling a shopping mall—may wear these vests: they offer defense against blades of various sizes, and attacks made with varying amounts of energy. These feature multiple layers of Kevlar, woven tightly enough to generate friction against blades, stopping them tearing through. They can also defend against blunt trauma, offering protection against physical assault. Door supervisors and retail security guards often wear these vests beneath their clothing.

Spike

Vests carrying spike protection will feature a weave of Kevlar even tighter than that found in stab vests to trap pointed tips before they can punch through. These can stop such lethal items as hypodermic needles (which may also carry harmful substances or contaminated DNA) and sharpened tools. These may be needed in certain environments in which aggressive individuals carry improvised weapons rather than engineered blades—this extra level of protection can often be added to ballistic or edged blade vests when ordering.

Never Underestimate the Importance of Fit

Body armor must be the right size to provide maximum protection to the vital organs. If the vest is the wrong fit—either too large or too small—then the wearer may still be vulnerable to harm: An oversized vest may hang away from the body, leaving enough space for a bullet or blade to pass between; an undersized vest might feel too tight and restrictive, meaning you're unable to move quite as freely as you need to. A large vest could also drop down away from the chest, or push into the throat during certain movements—an unacceptable distraction in difficult situations.

As body armor is designed to protect the vital organs, it must sit comfortably against the torso, and reach no lower than the navel area. To be sure of finding the right size, the wearer should measure their height and chest (ideally, with a friend or colleague nearby to check for accuracy), and then compare these with the supplier's size charts.



The Visibility Factor: Choosing Covert or Overt Armor

Manufacturers produce body armor in covert and overt styles, to suit various situations. Some assignments demand a low level of visibility, for discrete protection: Providing security at an upmarket club, a private event in elegant surroundings or close protection may demand smart dress—and a vest worn over such clothing will be inappropriate. In this case, wearing a covert vest is ideal. These vests are worn underneath other layers, with a lightweight construction and breathable materials (for greater comfort during prolonged wear). Some covert Kevlar vests are thinner, but they still provide effective protection at their respective level. (Ballistic vests above level IIIA are unavailable in a covert style, given their

additional layers and plates.)

For assignments in which discretion is unnecessary (such as maritime or event security), overt armor may be the best choice—this is the standard style, worn over clothing. These vests can be ideal with a uniform to convey an image of preparation and vigilance, potentially helping to warn potential troublemakers off.

Ultimately, when buying body armor, you need to make sure you know exactly which threats you may face, and which vest is best-suited to your individual requirements. If your firm is unable to purchase armor on your behalf, don't let the potential expense put you off buying your own—the protection they offer is invaluable.

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