

Protective Equipment for CIVIL DISTURBANCE UNITS

A Civil Disturbance Unit (CDU) comprises law enforcement officers trained to respond to protests, demonstrations and civil disturbances. Police facilitate and protect lawful, peaceful demonstrations and are present to maintain the safety of the public in the event of violence.

In order to effectively do their job to protect the public and themselves, officers need proper protective equipment. The lack of appropriate personal protective equipment can result in injuries to officers. Typical threats that officers can face during public disorder include impact weapons, Molotov cocktails, thrown or sprayed chemicals, and projectiles such as rocks, bricks and bottles. They also face the threat of firearms from active shooters within the protest.

Typical personal protective gear for a CDU officer includes:

- Flame-Retardant Coveralls/Uniform
- Protective Footwear
- Protective and Flame-Retardant Gloves
- Protective Helmets
- Personal Defense Shields to protect against impact weapons and thrown objects

- Blunt Trauma Limb Protectors
- Blunt Trauma Torso (to include ballistic-resistant body armor), shoulder, abdomen and groin protectors

Purchasing suitable protective equipment is made more difficult by the absence of standards in the U.S. for CDU equipment. The U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice is in the process of forming a Special Technical Committee to develop standards for CDU personal protective equipment.

For U.S. law enforcement agencies planning to procure new or certified CDU PPE, NIJ has identified either British Standard 7971, *Protective clothing and equipment for use in violent situations and in training*, or standards developed by the U.K. Home Office [i.e., *HOSDB Blunt Trauma Protector Standard for UK*



Police (2007), PSDB Protective Headwear Standard for UK Police (2004), and HOSDB Flame Retardant Overalls Standard for UK Police (2008)] as performance standards that may meet agencies' needs until such time as U.S. standards can be developed.

Considerations Regarding CDU Equipment:

- Operational and procurement considerations should include an analysis of the CDU's operational activities to determine the appropriate personal protective equipment required.
- An examination of the ergonomics of the CDU personal protective equipment and the compatibility with existing equipment is essential. Special care should be made to ensure proper protective coverage, and a look at weight and thermal burden of additional equipment.
- Equipment acquisition should be based on the specific needs and requirements for each agency. In the U.S. there is an increased ballistic threat (firearms), which could require more ballistic-resistant equipment. Law enforcement agencies should prioritize for the threats they are most likely to face, as well as being prepared for the potentially greatest threat.
- Agencies should talk to other agencies about their experience purchasing CDU protective equipment to gain insight on the process.
- Care and maintenance should be a factor in the acquisition of CDU protective equipment. Periodically inventory gear to evaluate condition and what needs to be replaced. The lifecycle of equipment can depend on care and maintenance of the equipment. (Polycarbonate is an essential component of riot shields, protective visors and goggles; all may weaken due to age, environmental conditions, and improper handling and storage.)



- What is the warranty and/or repair policy from the CDU protective equipment manufacturer or reseller? Is your critical equipment covered for defects? How long would a protective equipment repair take? What is the agency's protective equipment distribution model? Is equipment handed out to units as they mobilize, or is equipment given to individual officers to be their responsibility?
- Protective equipment is important, but training in tactics is also essential to successful response. Good protective gear, along with training in tactics, can help avoid officer and citizen injury during civil disturbances and allow for effective response to the given situation.
- Mutual aid agreements should be established with neighboring and concurrent jurisdictions well in advance of when they are actually needed. Build relationships with neighboring and concurrent jurisdictions and if possible train together and have similar equipment, which will make it easier for agencies to assist each other and provide mutual aid.

Photos courtesy of the Maryland State Police.