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StressVest adds realism to force-on-force training

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Force-on-force training is a critical part of any law enforcement officer's basic and in-service education. Basic skills learned by shooting holes in a paper target or striking a pad or training dummy don't translate well to a world where the targets move on their own, hide behind things, and shoot or hit back. There is no substitute for introducing a live opponent into the fight.

Those live opponents come with their own set of complexities. Using paintball, [Airsoft](#), or Simunition weapons means protecting the participants from injury, and that involves wearing goggles, face masks and possibly heavy gloves that detract from the realism of the scenario. The best simulation training duplicates the real world as closely as possible.

That's what the makers of the [StressVest](#) system are going for with their "stress inoculation training" system.



The StressVest is an offshoot of and uses the same technology as the ShockKnife, made by the same company.

All in the Family

The StressVest is an offshoot of and uses the same technology as the [ShockKnife](#), made by the same company. The problem the ShockKnife tries to address is the same — realistic simulation training. Most edged-weapon defense training has to be done with dull or rubber knives for obvious reasons — it won't do to have trainees finish up the course with gaping, open wounds. Yet, there's no negative reinforcement to being "cut" with a rubber knife. The ShockKnife uses a harmless but painful high voltage, low amperage jolt of electricity to zap anyone who comes in contact with the blade. The reinforcement is realistic and immediate.

The StressVest extrapolates the concept to the entire upper body and even extremities with a vest worn over the trainee's shirt. When the laser-sensitive panels on the front and back are struck with the beam from a laser emitter in an opponent's firearm, the wearer gets a very brief but painful shock. The vest can be set up for varying intensities of shock, and can even be set to require multiple laser hits before delivering the shock. Accessory panels for the arms can extend the sensation to the extremities.

The basic model of the StressVest is manually activated by a trainer before a scenario begins. An "RF" (radio frequency) model uses a car key-type wireless fob to activate or deactivate the vest(s) at the instructor's command. The vests themselves are powered by a standard 9V battery.

Tremendous Training Value

The triggering laser beams come from bullet-size emitters that drop into regular sidearms or shotguns equipped with a retrofit kit, or from special dedicated simulation firearms that will fit in regular duty holsters but are incapable of firing projectile ammunition. Which are best suited is largely dependent on the type of firearms in use by your trainees. Sidearms that fire double-action without manual recocking will work with the drop-in hardware, but weapons like the Glock — which requires racking of the slide to reset the trigger

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— aren't suited for that type of adapter.

Used effectively, the value of this kind of reinforcement is tremendous. Early simulation training would end when a bad guy got the drop on the police trainee, firing a blank cartridge followed by a grim, "you're dead." Eventually trainers got the idea they were conditioning cops to stop fighting and die if they got shot, and the mantra of "never give up while there's still a breath left in you" became the watchword. Still, trainees didn't have to fight through anything except physical resistance from the simulated bad guys until paintballs, Airsoft and Simunitions came into play, and it hurt to get popped with one of those projectiles. The StressVest maintains that same sense of realism but eliminates the need for special protective gear and an environment tolerant of stray paintballs and similar decoration.

Introduction of gear like this requires careful supervision and policy writing. Cops are born pranksters, and any device capable of delivering a painless but harmless shock is going to be used in a practical joke faster than you can say "hostile workplace lawsuit." Everyone with access to the equipment has to understand how it is to be used, and that penalties for willful misuse will be swift, sure and severe.

This is not inexpensive hardware. The price of a single basic model of the StressVest is \$1,999.00, with discounts for multiple units purchased as a package. Their website includes several videos, testimonials, a price list, and other details.

About the author

Tim Dees is a writer, editor, trainer, and former law enforcement officer. After 15 years as a police officer with the Reno Police Department and elsewhere in Northern Nevada, Tim taught criminal justice as a full-time professor and instructor at colleges in Wisconsin, West Virginia, Georgia, and Oregon.

He was also a regional training coordinator for the Oregon Dept. of Public Safety Standards & Training, providing in-service training to 65 criminal justice agencies in central and eastern Oregon.

Tim has written more than 300 articles for nearly every national law enforcement publication in the United States, and is the author of The Truth About Cops, published by Hyperink Press. In 2005, Tim became the first editor-in-chief for Officer.com, moving to the same position for LawOfficer.com at the beginning of 2008. He now writes on applications of technology in law enforcement from his home in SE Washington state.

Tim holds a bachelor's degree in biological science from San José State University, a master's degree in criminal justice from The University of Alabama, and the Certified Protection Professional credential from ASIS International. He serves on the executive board of the Public Safety Writers Association.

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Posted by jpaynter on Monday, December 26, 2011 12:00 AM Pacific Report Abuse



Looks like interesting tech. The cost would be difficult to overcome but the next generation of cops will likely do a lot of training with these. One good point of this item would be the increased realism of suspect interaction during training scenarios- the masks necessary for simunitions make verbal interaction very stilted. I agree on slammadew's points re: protective gear & the NLTA pain penalty.

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Posted by **ranger52** on Saturday, December 24, 2011 08:48 AM Pacific

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I agree....As a POST Firearms Instructor it can be difficult to keep the flock from fooling around which in turn can mean (immediate ejection from the training area). This particular media would have to be used with a lot of oversight by trained instructors.

Posted by **evoss** on Friday, December 23, 2011 05:17 PM Pacific

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What? Cops might use the electric vests inappropriately? I'm shocked!

Posted by **slammadew** on Friday, December 23, 2011 12:36 AM Pacific

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Sounds like a great idea. I can remember going through my first experience with simunitions about 15 years ago. Back then the safety gear consisted of the face mask/helmet, your regular body armor and long sleeves and pants. If you wanted to wear a cup, that was ok too. Now adays you've got to strap on this big padded chest protector like you're a major league umpire, neck guard, gloves, protective pants that are like chaps, it's ridiculous! You get done with a scenario and you've got several hits on you that you never even felt! When did we become a nation of pansie cops who can't take a little pain during training? Not to mention that it totally takes away from he realism factor. I don't know about anyone else but I don't usually strap on an umpires vest when I go to work.

The Stress Vest looks small and unobtrusive enough that it should work well. And having a system that you don't have to wear a face mask is awesome. I know they are a necessity with paintball/simunitions but man are they a pain!

Anyway, I'd love to try out the Stress Vest. I just wonder how long it would be before my agency requires some sort of protective undershirt that you have to wear so that you don't feel the shock so much!

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