



Report to the City Council  
Council Meeting of September 13, 2016

**Agenda Section:** New Business

**Subject:** Presentation by PD Staff showing the new style of load bearing and non-load bearing ballistic vest choices for Police Officers

**CEQA Status:** Not a CEQA project

**Prepared By:** William Imboden, Chief of Police 

**Approved By:** Jennifer Phillips, City Manager 

**BACKGROUND**

In May, 2016 the City Council approved funds for the purchase of new ballistic body armor for the Police Department to supplement funds provided through a federal grant being applied for. Once that action was approved, the Department began researching various types of ballistic vests and load bearing ballistic vests. The Department has been field testing the load bearing vest since July, 2016.

**DISCUSSION**

Police agencies from around the country have begun issuing officers Load Bearing Vests (LBVs) in an effort to help alleviate and prevent a nationwide leading cause of officer injury which is lower back injury. The vest provides relief and helps to mitigate long term injuries by redistributing as much as three-quarters of the weight away from their lower backs and hips.

Officers typically carry up to 30 pounds of equipment on their uniform belt. This includes a gun, radio, handcuffs, firearm, pepper spray, Taser, cell phone, baton, ammunition and other equipment as needed. The load bearing vests are worn over the uniform shirt and allow officers to move much of this equipment to the vest and off of the officers lower back and hips. The load bearing vest also serves as a carrier for the officer's ballistic body armor.

The Saint Helena Police Department is always looking for ways to improve the work environment and protect the health of its officers. While the issuance of load bearing vests to patrol officers is relatively new in Napa Valley, they are quickly gaining nationwide popularity due to their health benefits. Napa PD and Calistoga PD have both expressed interest in offering LBVs to their Patrol Officers. The Saint Helena officer

who has been testing the LBV has reported significant relief from pre-existing back and hip pain.

In the recent past Saint Helena PD has had Officers on long term leave due to back injuries. One such injury resulted in a retirement for the Officer. Others have had costly surgeries to repair permanent damage. The purpose and intent of providing LBVs as an option is to reduce the risk of future costly and painful back injuries.

Additionally, the load bearing vests are worn over the uniform shirt and don't trap heat, allowing for increased officer comfort. Currently officers wear their protective body armor under their uniform shirt, which tends to trap heat, causing discomfort during the summer months.

For Officers that do not want to wear the load bearing vests, the Saint Helena Police Department will still allow a newer style over the shirt vest that does not hold equipment, but does contain the ballistic panels, allowing for more comfort and mobility during hot weather.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no additional fiscal impact to the budget, beyond what was already approved.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Information only

**ATTACHMENTS**

None