



# NATIONAL FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE®

1-800-451-2711 • 615-399-0400 • FAX 615-399-0400

**CHUCK CANTERBURY**  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

**JERRY W. ATNIP**  
NATIONAL SECRETARY

November 17, 2003

The Honorable John D. Ashcroft  
Attorney General of the United States  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear General Ashcroft,

I am writing on behalf of the membership of the Fraternal Order of Police to advise you of our concerns regarding the use of a material known as Zylon in the manufacture of soft body armor, and to respectfully request that the Department review its impact on the integrity of new and current vests.

The F.O.P. has learned that Toyobo Co, LTD of Japan, the company that produces Zylon, has acknowledged that their product may experience a twenty percent (20%) loss of strength over a two (2) year period—well before the five (5) year warranty on the body armor itself. Many manufacturers of soft body armor use Zylon in their vests, making this a life-and-death issue for every law enforcement officer in the nation. Second Chance Body Armor has already instituted a recall on this product and has offered several options for law enforcement officers to exchange vests which are made with Zylon, and the F.O.P. is urging the entire body armor industry to address this matter expeditiously.

It has also come to our attention that certain police executives have been warning their officers about wearing soft body armor with Zylon as a component. We regard any advice or directive not to wear such vests as highly irresponsible. We urge, and we hope you will as well, that all law enforcement officers wear their soft body armor at all times. Any vest is better than no vest at all.

While the F.O.P. has been monitoring this issue, we believe that the seriousness of this issue merits an investigation by the Department of Justice, and urge you to have the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) test all new and in use brands of vests that contain Zylon. If this testing proves that Zylon degrades to a point of lessening the effectiveness of soft body armor, we would respectfully request that NIJ withdraw their certification of such vests and move to have the manufacturers replace them. Further, we believe very strongly that NIJ must change the way they certify soft body armor and should develop standards that include the testing of vests from manufacture through the termination of the warranty period.

The Fraternal Order of Police will be asking that all manufacturers of soft body armor provide the Justice Department with their internal testing data and cooperate fully with this call to action.

I met with Associate Attorney General Robert D. McCallum, Jr., on 7 November and discussed this issue at length with him. The contents of this letter accurately summarize the advice I provided to him at that meeting.

I would also like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me on 5 November to talk about other critical law enforcement issues. Your leadership at the Department of Justice and your genuine concern for the safety of both law enforcement officers and the public they protect is deeply appreciated by the more than 310,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police. If I can provide any additional information on this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me or Executive Director Jim Pasco at my Washington office.

Sincerely,

Chuck Canterbury  
National President