

Toolbox Talks

Ergonomics And Police Duty Belts

Duty belt discomfort has been worsening in recent years for several reasons, such as the increase in time officers spend in vehicles and the heavier gear carried on their duty belt. The conversion from revolvers to semiautomatic weapons and the associated increased weight of the spare magazines on the belt has added 3 to 4 pounds in many jurisdictions. Additional carried items include radios, tasers, flashlights, batons, and extra handcuffs in some jurisdictions.

There has been a trend toward designing less flexible duty belt holster systems to increase an officer's weapon retention in the event of a physical encounter with a suspect. The more rigid the duty belt holster system is, the more critical its shape and location in obtaining a proper fit. Because breaking in a new holster system can take several years, the rigidity of newly issued belt holster systems is a major issue for all officers.



Here are some ways to help prevent officer injury:

Alternatives to the Duty Belt:

- ★ **Suspenders** - Suspenders are effective because they distribute the weight of the equipment over the shoulders and chest rather than just on the waist.
- ★ **Tactical Vest or Harness** - Harnesses contain multiple pouches over the chest and back. A harness goes over the ballistic vest and can reduce the need for officers to keep reaching around to get their equipment.

Loading the Duty Belt:

- ★ **Avoid placing hard objects on the lumbar spine** – Handcuffs carried on the back of the belt may create back pain from constant pressure on the lower back while sitting in a car.
- ★ **Evenly distribute the weight on your belt.** This will help reduce hip issues.
- ★ **Place a soft pouch over the lumbar spine on the duty belt.**
- ★ **Flashlights should be compact, light and powerful** – Thinner and smaller lights are easier to control and are more likely to be always carried.

Start with a Better Belt

- ★ Nylon belts that are 2 inches wide result in increased officer comfort with fewer complaints of the belt digging in into their ribs and on the rim of the pelvis.
- ★ Nylon duty gear is generally less expensive, lighter, and easier to maintain than leather gear.

