

InterAgency Board for Equipment Standardization and Interoperability (IAB)

By Tom Nolan

The ultimate goal of the NTOA is to improve public safety and domestic security through training, education and tactical excellence. This is a very noble goal and one that we can achieve because of the professionalism of our organization and our willingness to work collaboratively with other groups that also seek to improve the professional status of our first responders. One such organization is the InterAgency Board for Equipment Standardization and Interoperability (IAB).

The IAB is a collaborative panel of emergency preparedness and response practitioners, federal employees and subject matter experts representing a wide array of technical expertise. Much like the NTOA, the IAB facilitates the exchange of knowledge and ideas to improve national preparedness and promote interoperability and compatibility among local, state and federal response communities. Based on direct field experience, IAB members advocate for and assist with the development and implementation of performance criteria, standards and test protocols, as well as technical, operating and training requirements for all-hazards incident response equipment.

The IAB is organized into a leadership team, a federal agency coordinating committee and seven subgroups. The leadership team is selected from the ranks of state and local membership. The Federal Agency Coordinating Committee is the group that provides the interface between the IAB and the sponsoring federal government agencies. Each of the seven subgroups is co-chaired by a state and local representative and a federal representative, and is staffed by a great mix of first responders, scientists and experts in standards development organizations and testing companies who are subject matter experts in areas such as:

- Equipment
- Health, medical and responder safety
- Information management and communications
- Science and technology
- Standards coordination
- Strategic planning
- Training and exercises

The NTOA has been a partner with the IAB for years and members of our organization staff the various subgroups.

One of particular interest to our NTOA membership is the Standards Coordination Subgroup. While “standards coordination” is probably not frequently discussed by SWAT operators, the results of this subgroup have a direct impact on the safety of SWAT officers on a daily basis. While the standards coordination subgroup has several roles and functions, I would like to focus on two priorities that the group has worked with standards development organizations to address in the past two years: ballistic helmets and protective shields.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STANDARDS

The IAB identified the need for a new standard to define performance requirements and test methods for protective helmets worn by U.S. law enforcement. These requirements apply to both ballistic threats and blunt trauma. This standard was needed because the current standards and test methods were outdated and did not address current threats faced by officers in the field. In fact, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Standards for Ballistic Helmets had not been updated since December 1981.

How many of you have seen ballistic helmets advertised as “offering NIJ Level IIIA protection?” If you review this standard, you will find that it does not even list a level above Level II. Those that are advertising a helmet with Level IIIA protection are referencing the latest NIJ Ballistic Resistance of Body Armor Standard (NIJ 0101.06). Is it appropriate to compare a rigid helmet to flexible body armor? Body armor does not have mechanical attachment points as a ballistic helmet does. Shouldn’t the bolt that holds your restraint system in place be tested against ballistic threats to ensure that it does not become a secondary projectile? Without an organization like the IAB acting as an advocate on behalf of law enforcement, these issues may not have been addressed by helmet manufacturers.

The IAB also identified the need for a new standard to define performance requirements and test methods for protective shields used by U.S. law enforcement. Currently there is no ballistic shield standard. There is a ballistic-resistant protective materials standard, but it has not been updated since 1985. While this standard does address ballistic protection levels to Level IIIA, it is a “ballistic materials” standard. It does not address specific issues with ballistic shields.

Again, will the mechanical attachment points for handles and lights become a secondary projectile when tested against a ballistic threat? Does the seam between the shield and the viewport offer the appropriate level of ballistic protection? What is the maximum backface deformation allowed in the area where the shield comes in contact with the human body (e.g. hand grip)? What about the harsh environmental conditions that our shields endure? Most are stored in vehicles and are therefore exposed to



Helmet that has been prepared for ballistic penetration and backface deformation testing. (Photo courtesy of HP White Laboratory & Ops Core)

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temperature cycling through hot and cold extremes.

These shields also need to be able to provide the appropriate level of ballistic protection after the various impacts, including drops, slams and more that they will face while being handled by SWAT operators. Since the IAB staffs its committees with actual end users as well as subject matter experts and



Ballistic shield after testing. (Photo courtesy of Ken Fuller, US Marshals)

scientists, there is a blend of input to address specific issues faced by law enforcement. The end user can explain the environment to which the shield is exposed, but it is the scientist that can take that issue and form it into the proper performance requirement and testing criteria.

Currently the IAB is working to have a number of standards developed that are listed on the 2014 IAB Standards Development Priority List. Those of particular interest to NTOA membership are:

- Standard test methods for robot operator evaluations
- Product standard for tactical operation video cameras
- Product standard for body-worn video cameras
- Product standard for conducted energy devices
- Product standard for chemical munitions
- Product standard for impact munitions
- Product standard for distraction devices
- Product standard for protective gloves

The IAB seeks to be the emergency responder's source concerning policies, practices, standards, training, and research and development. It intends to be the trusted, authoritative representative of operational knowledge and technical expertise. Similarly, the NTOA desires to serve as an educational resource with regard to the operations of SWAT teams and to provide officer safety information to law enforcement. The IAB is also committed to being proactive in its approach to national and global trends that affect the response community. As this

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collaboration between the NTOA and the IAB continues to grow, the representatives of all the response disciplines of the IAB will help our NTOA members to adapt early to emerging trends so we are prepared to address any new threats to law enforcement. ■

To learn more about the IAB, visit its website at iab.gov. NTOA members interested in providing expertise to an IAB subgroup should contact the author at tnolan@umtownship.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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