Safariland
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Brief History of Security Holsters

There is a growing concern in the Law Enforcement community for the safety of law enforcement officers. More agencies are recognizing the need for helping officers keep their weapons from falling into the wrong hands. In the last 10 years, 688 police officers have been killed in the line of duty in the United States. Sadly, 62 of those officers were disarmed and killed with their own handguns. The **FBI's Uniform Crime Report** http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm, does not keep records on those officers that were disarmed, assaulted, or compromised in some way by being disarmed; however, that number is estimated at being at least three times as great as those offers killed. In many of those cases, the subject escaped and used the officer's weapon in a later crime.

In the late 1960s, several holster companies began to offer "security" models in their line of holsters. It was believed that officers were losing their weapons from the rear in surprise attacks. Those security designs focused on offering added resistance from someone trying to draw the weapon straight up or up and back. Most of the new "security" designs became front-break models. In order for the officer to draw his weapon after releasing a strap mechanism, he would rotate the weapon slightly forward to release the weapon. The front-break holsters became very popular and are still used by many departments today.

In the early 1970s, Bill Rogers, former FBI agent and founder of the Rogers Holster Company, studied and tested all of the existing duty holsters to see which design was best before he began to design his uniform holster product, using synthetic laminate construction. Bill Rogers developed a system based on a series of simple tests that could be conducted in the field by the end user. Safariland purchased the Rogers Holster Company in 1985. At the time of purchase, Safariland adopted the security rating system that had been developed by the Rogers Holster Company in 1975.

Advancement in holster technology and no set standard for testing has in many ways confused the terminology used to describe security levels. Because of this confusion, many law enforcement agencies presently are shown holsters of other manufacturers and are told that the product conforms to a certain level of security. In most cases those stated levels of security do not match the same tests that Safariland has historically used for over 20 years. In order to clarify the Safariland tests and to make it easier to understand the levels of security when compared to present day designs, clearly defined terminology is required and is presented here.

Although Safariland has not changed the method of testing its holsters, design advancements over the past twenty years have changed, from the use of the socket and stud snap as the primary securing lock to several locking mechanisms that re-engage if the user releases them. Safariland has been and continues to be the leader in the industry because of its innovative designs rigorous testing methods and its refusal to settle for anything but the best.

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Safariland Testing Methodology

Safariland adopted a security rating system that had been developed by the Rogers Holster Company in 1975. This system was based on a series of simple tests that could be conducted in the field by the end user. Although Safariland has not changed the method of testing its holsters, in reviewing the present mechanisms we have changed the security level rating of some of our models. Twenty years ago the use of the socket and stud snap was the primary securing lock. Now the industry uses several locking mechanisms that re-engage if the user releases them. In some cases an additional movement is required by the user to release a mechanism. For example, in the case of Safariland's SLS, the user must overcome the pressure of two springs to push the hood down in order to unlock the mechanism. Then, while holding the unit in the down unlocked position, the user must rotate the hood completely forward to allow the weapon an opening to exit from the holster. If the user simply pushes the hood down to the unlocked position and then releases it, allowing the hood to re-lock, the holster is as secure as it was initially. However, since there are two separate and distinct motions (much like releasing a snap and then rotating the weapon forward slightly with the older 295 holster before drawing), the SLS provides two levels of security by itself. By adding a Sentry device to the SLS, which requires a separate and distinct motion by the user, a third level of security is achieved. In order to clarify the Safariland tests and to make it easier to understand the levels of security when compared to present day designs, clearly defined terminology is required.

The Test
Retention Level I™

The Holster Retention Test is described as applying all the force to the grip or handle of the weapon by an individual while the weapon is totally secured in the holster and mounted on a suitable belt being worn by another individual. The test is to simulate a "grab and snatch" initiated by an adversary. The direction of force is unlimited but the duration of the force is limited to 5 seconds. At the end of the 5 seconds, the weapon must still be secure in the holster and the holster must still be attached to the operator. The operator must be able to accomplish a draw after the attack within the times set as a standard by the controlling department or within two seconds if no standard exists. If the holster passes this initial test, it qualifies as a Level I Retention™ Security Holster. The Holster Retention Test described above is referred to as the "Test", but over the years, it has become synonymous with "Level I test"

Level II Retention ™

Before a holster can be considered for a Level II rating, it must first past the Holster Retention Test. After passing the Test, the primary lock must be disabled and the same Retention Test is repeated. In order to test the holster for a Level II rating, the primary securing device must be determined. The primary securing device is defined as the lock that requires the first action by the user in order to start the drawing sequence. This initial action is an individual and deliberate action by the user to start the unlocking of any securing mechanism. As an example, the flipping back of the lever release of a Sentry device installed on a Safariland SLS system would

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be the first action required by the user, so the Sentry would be considered the primary securing device. In order to deactivate the lock, the lever, button, pad, tab or other indexing point must be placed and held in the position that the user would place it in with the initial action. In the case of an SLS without a Sentry, the hood must be pushed down and held in the down position but not pushed forward, as that would be a second required motion by the user. The holster is tested with the initial lock disabled. It does not have to pass the complete test. If the holster exhibits the ability to further secure the weapon in a meaningful way after the primary lock is disengaged then it qualifies as a Retention Level II™ security holster. If after disabling the initial lock, the holster can again completely pass the Holster Retention Test, then it is clearly is rated as a Level II and may qualify for additional levels of security.

Level III Retention ™ and additional levels

A Level I holster that has completely passed a second Holster Retention Test, with the primary lock disabled, is clearly rated at a Level II. It can be further tested for additional levels of security. To determine a further rating, the second motion or action required by the user to continue the drawing sequence must be simulated. As in the example described in the Level II rating of the SLS, the hood would be pushed down and then pushed forward in the final unlocked position before the Retention Test is performed. The holster does not have to pass the complete test. If the holster exhibits the ability to secure the weapon in a meaningful way after the secondary lock is disabled, then it qualifies as a Level III Retention™ security holster. Some models of the 6280 holster can be adjusted with the tension screw such that the weapon will significantly bind in the holster if it is not drawn in a straight up motion. Of course if the holster passes a complete Retention Test with the second lock disabled, it can be tested for further security levels by continuing to disable additional locks and conducting the same tests as outlined above.

The following are some examples of Safariland holsters rated using the guidelines above:

6320 …….Level I Retention™
200 ……...Level I Retention™
295 ……...Level II Retention™
6280 as normally adjusted ……....Level II Retention™
6280 w/ tension screw adjusted firmly……....Level III Retention™
6360……..Level III Retention™
6270……..Level III Retention™
070 ……...Level III Retention™
6070 …….Level IV Retention™
6295 …….Level IV Retention™

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Safariland Holster Construction

Advantages of SafariLaminate™ over Leather

In the early 1970s Rogers pioneered the use of synthetics to build his holster designs. Leather did not provide the strength necessary to survive the destructive security test. Rogers developed the patented process known as the thermo-laminate process. In the process, a thermo-formable plastic material known as Acrylic PVC (commonly known by the name brand Kydex), the suede lining and the outside finish material were all coated with a liquid Nitrile rubber compound. Once the rubber cured it could be handled without bonding to itself. The big pieces of coated material were then die cut. The cut parts were assembled together with T-nuts inserted along with any additional reinforcement material. The assembled part was heated to about 300 degrees F and pressed together vulcanizing the entire part together. The final laminated part was bonded so well that the strength of the part was significantly greater than the sum of the individual strengths. This same phenomena is well known with materials such as plywood and fiberglass, but had not been discovered in the field of holster design until this time. The laminated part was then die cut to an exacting pattern and stitching was added for aesthetics. The part was then re-heated to 350 degrees F and placed on a metal mandrel, which had the general shape of a weapon. This unit was then sandwiched between two layers of foam rubber and pressed until the material cooled. Once stabilized the part was removed from the mandrel and finished.

A Safariland Holster has the following advantages over a leather holster:

1. Its molded shape would not stretch, deform or change shape.

2. The holster would not crush like leather holsters that had internal metal supports.

3. Because of the rigidity of the sides, a tension device provided a better clamping force on the weapon.

4. Because of the inherent strength of the laminate, the holster could be made thinner and lighter than a leather model.

5. Because of the strength and rigidity of the laminate, locking devices could be simply attached inside the holster allowing the weapon to be mechanically secured in the holster.

6. The single most important advantage of the laminate was its strength. Because of its ability to hold a shape under extreme pressures, it provided protection to the weapon many times greater than any other material. Air spaces around critical parts such as sights, slide stops, take down levers, and magazine releases were formed to provide even greater protection. In the late 1970s, the Rogers Holster Co. used to demonstrate this feature by striking an aluminum model of a pistol with a hatchet while it was in a leather holster, a Nylon holster, and a Rogers's holster. The model was deeply cut in the leather holster and significantly damaged in the Nylon cloth holster. The pistol never showed a mark in the laminate holster.

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Advantages of SafariLaminate™ over Nylon

Nylon fabric gear is in most cases more flexible and softer than leather or laminate. It is usually a few imperceptible ounces lighter than the other materials. It does, however, have some structural problems. The material by itself cannot be molded, so the containers such as the holsters become bulky. Since they can't conform to the shape of the item carried, they tend to be as big all over as the thickest part of the item. Secondly, because of the flexibility of the material, they do not secure the items being held very well. Nor do they support trigger locks or other mechanical devices without a lot of reinforcement. This necessary reinforcement adds to the bulkiness and weight of the product. The holster and weapon are constantly coming in contact with the wearer's surroundings because of its obtrusive size. The weapon and holster become so obvious that they are considered aggressive and objectionable by many of the general public. The black fabric becomes dingy with time. The weave captures lint, dirt, and any non-black compound from chalk dust to hand lotion. The fabric as well as the binding can snag and become frayed. The fabric against the weapon does not wick the moisture away from the surface of the weapon. Some Nylon holsters even have closed bottoms, which simply become a water trap as the moisture condenses on the weapon when the wearer moves from a cool environment to warm humid one. Nylon fabric can be abrasive. The weave itself has been known to abrade away a front plastic sight on the Glock pistol in a few dozen draws. The material will also trap dirt and dust and become sandpaper to the enclosed weapon. The biggest single problem with fabric duty gear, especially those made with laminated foam is that they offer little protection to the enclosed item against a hard impact. The Navy SEALS, Army Special Forces, FBI HRT and hundreds of SWAT units have tried the nylon fabric holsters. Over the years of hard use they have had tritium inserts broken, sights bent over, safeties bent, and a high incidence of lost weapons. They now use SafariLaminate™ gear exclusively. Neither SafariLaminate™ nor leather can compete in price with a Nylon fabric construction on the initial purchase. However, over the long term, Nylon fabric has not proven itself economically advantageous over the other materials.