

Survey Response Regarding Utility Uniforms

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I received 28 responses to my inquiry regarding utility uniforms. Of these, 14 agencies allow utility uniforms for everyday routine duty, including patrol. The other 14 agencies only allow utilities for inclement weather and/or special duty units.

Three agencies had discontinued full time use of utility uniforms after either a trial period or a lengthy period where they had been approved. Discontinuing full time approval was based on poor appearance.

Of the 14 agencies that do approve full time use of utilities, 12 feel they have an acceptable appearance. The other 2 do not feel they look acceptable, but seem to be locked into them due to past practice or MOU issues.

Only a few agencies mentioned a need to increase inspections with utility uniforms.

No agency has a specific policy requiring dry cleaning vs. laundering of utility uniforms, although several have a dry cleaning service paid by the agency with the result being that they are dry cleaned. There were a few comments that the utility uniforms that are professionally dry cleaned and pressed maintain a much better appearance.

While many of those who responded had strong feelings about uniform appearance, only a few mentioned that the public had any reaction to utilities vs. traditional wool uniforms. A few did comment that bloused pants are too militaristic and there were some negative public reactions to bloused pants.

A common comment was that the polyester/cotton blend utilities tend to fade over time. Several agencies post a comparison cloth sample so that officers/supervisors can determine that their uniform is too faded.

Several responses addressed Blauer brand polyester/wool blend utility uniforms as having a better appearance and less fading than the polyester/cotton blend.

Several also mentioned polyester/rayon blend fabrics that hold their appearance with repeated laundering. My Risk Manager and Fire Department recommend against 100% synthetic fabrics due to flammability. I did my own informal and unscientific test on a 68% polyester/30% rayon/2% lycra uniform fabric. I found that the 100% synthetic fabric melted and burned rapidly when exposed to flame. A poly/cotton blend burned slowly and wool would not ignite.