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City buys face shields to protect cops from G-8 protesters

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Chicago Police officers facing off against protesters during the NATO and G-8 Summits will be equipped with new face shields that fit comfortably over gas masks and include a seal to prevent officers from being blinded by liquids thrown at them.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel's administration has awarded a \$193,461 emergency contract to Colorado-based Super Seer Corp. for the purchase of 3,057 new and improved shields to be used by officers on the front lines during the May 19-21 summits at McCormick Place.

The contract marks the first use of the sweeping power granted to Emanuel to purchase goods and services for the summits — without City Council approval or competitive bidding — provided those items cannot be purchased under existing contracts.

The new shields demanded by the Fraternal Order of Police apparently fall into that category.

An estimated 1,138 of them will be used with powder-blue motorcycle helmets purchased before 2005 at a cost of \$84-a-piece. Another 1,919 will cost \$51 each and fit tightly against helmets purchased after 2005. Both shields are larger, twice as thick as the old ones and have a liquid seal at the top.

“That means, when they are in a riot situation and they get liquid thrown at them, the liquid will roll off the helmet shell and off the face shield and not into the officer's face, The old one did not have a seal, so liquids could get through,” Super Seer President Steve Smith said, calling the contract an “emergency purchase for the G-8 summit.”

“The older-style helmets would not interface with the new gas masks the city is using. The new shields will allow them to wear their new gas masks and have the shields fully come down and protect the officers' face over the gas mask.”

Fraternal Order of Police President Mike Shields demanded the new shields to prevent officers from being blinded by bags of urine and feces thrown at them by “anarchists” and other hard-core protesters.

On Monday, Shields welcomed the emergency purchase. But he questioned whether 3,057 shields would be enough if, as he fears, tens of thousands of protesters descend on Chicago for the unprecedented back-to-back summits expected to shine an international spotlight on the city.

“We have 9,500 patrol officers. Every one of them needs a new shield because every one of them has the old one and it's completely ineffective. It's a very thin plexi-glass. If you press on it with your thumb, it would

crack. If you threw a rock at it, it will pop off. Water can seep right through. Any liquid can seep right through,” Shields said.

“Rioters known to attend NATO and G-8 meetings have been known to throw bags of urine and bags of feces at police. Chicago Police officers need a shield that can adapt to what is being thrown at them.”

Asked about the potential for trouble at the summits, Smith said demonstrators throwing bags of urine and other liquids is a distinct possibility.

“It’s a very real possibility. Any time there’s a G-8 summit anywhere in the world, it’s a very volatile situation. Add to that the NATO summit and you have the potential for a very volatile situation and injury to police officers,” Smith said.

In an e-mail to the Chicago Sun-Times, Police Department spokeswoman Melissa Stratton refused to say how many officers the department expects to be on the front lines during the summits. But she said state law limits emergency contract provisions to purchase equipment to \$250,000.

“Additionally, the existing vendor only has the capacity to make about 800 replacement shields per week. As a long-lead equipment purchase, we exercised the city’s existing authority to begin the procurement process as early as possible as we plan for the summits,” she said.

“We have already initiated another procurement for more equipment and will continue to assess our needs on a daily basis.”

On Monday, Shields reiterated past complaints that City Hall has yet to finalize agreements to bring in out-of-state police officers to serve as reinforcements.

And he ridiculed the eight hours of, what he called “baton certification training” being offered to officers before the summits.

“Teaching baton formation doesn’t prepare you for somebody throwing a Molotov cocktail at your head,” Shields said.

“If other cities give officers three days of training, so should Chicago.”

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