

At the forefront of national security

AFP Bomb Appraisal Officers play a vital role in ensuring national security at Australia's 11 major airports.

AFP officers working at Australia's 11 major airports undertake a variety of law enforcement duties, from deterring and responding to security threats to investigating serious and organised crime. They also perform ongoing community policing roles. Providing vital support to these officers are specialist teams that underpin pivotal AFP national security capabilities at airports.

The Counter Terrorist First Response (Airport Uniformed Operations) team and its Bomb Appraisal Officers (BAOs) specialise in bomb detection and deterrence and are integral to the process.

Their work covers a wide variety of emerging situations and can see them analysing suspicious items at

one moment, managing an arising bomb threat situation the next, and later, providing advice to Australian Government partner agencies.

Importantly, BAOs have an in-depth understanding of the potential impact of their decisions on businesses and the public. While public safety is paramount, the aviation sector is a multi-million dollar industry and any disruption is costly.

Whatever the situation, they respond quickly and with technical accuracy. They must take a variety of elements into consideration, including search protocols, technical analysis and operational plans.

An important part of the job is high-risk searches, which can involve assessing buildings and aircraft. BAOs also contribute to the safety of VIPs travelling into and out of Australian airports.

The work is challenging. No two airports or situations are the same and it is incumbent on the BAOs to apply their highly specialised training to find effective ways of helping to protect Australia's national security.

// BAOs act on information and intelligence. Their training enables them to look at the whole situation. //

01: Suiting up in an Explosive Ordnance Disposal suit. **02:** The Explosive Ordnance Disposal suit worn by BAOs.



BAOs act on information and intelligence and their training instructors demand that they learn to consider an entire situation, gather new facts and decide on the best course of action. Once the presence of explosive materials or improvised explosive devices are confirmed, state or territory police bomb response teams are responsible for a safe resolution.

AFP officers undertake a testing four-week training course to become BAOs. Recognised by the Federal Government's National Counter Terrorist Committee, students must pass stringent criteria to be considered for BAO duties at major Australian airports. This includes physical, cognitive and technical assessments.

National Team Leader for the BAO program Brett Sampson said BAOs are specially trained AFP officers who direct their skills into a specific and demanding area to help uphold Australia's national security.

"It is something you do because you really want to do it and that's what makes BAOs unique. They have a passion for protecting Australia through the detection of explosives and appraising tough situations," he said.

To ensure that they can handle any type of high-risk situation, trainees must pass an equipment compatibility assessment, including wearing a full Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) suit and perform ladder and stair climbs, a 400

metre walk, and dexterity and agility tests.

They are also put through a stringent movement test where they must respond effectively in a confined and low light space. These tests assess stamina, heart rates and propensity to claustrophobia.

The theoretical component of the course challenges participants to demonstrate an understanding of the practical and technical aspects of basic electronics and explosives. BAOs also need to show their understanding of radiation and x-ray equipment to ensure public safety.

Graduate Neville Walker said the intensive course and assessments were tough to pass.

"I spent my weekends studying. There is a lot of theory to get through and understand," he said.

Once qualified, each BAO must complete a mandatory recertification every 12 months to retain their qualification.

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03: A trainee BAO wears the Explosive Ordnance Disposal suit during an assessment. **04:** Trainee BAOs take part in an equipment compatibility assessment. **05:** Protective head gear as part of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal suit worn by BAOs. **06:** A trainee uses technical equipment in a search for explosives to determine the most effective approach.

