

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

=====

**Why should I?  
Physical fitness incentives for the Pasadena ISD Police Department**

=====

**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**

=====

**By**

**Sergeant Cory W. Scott**

**Pasadena ISD Police Dept  
Pasadena, Texas  
June 27, 2003**

## **ABSTRACT**

According to indicated literature there is a rampant problem with law enforcement officers plaguing America: Obesity.

This proposal is a program to motivate the officers of the Pasadena ISD Police Department. Articles were referenced and a survey used to show that Officers want to help themselves get back in shape. Pasadena ISD Police Officers would volunteer for a physical fitness program within the Pasadena ISD Police Department. This paper focuses on mandatory fitness testing for these volunteer officers and the need for a fitness program both with individual officers and with department sponsored programs.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction . . . . .	1
Review of Literature . . . . .	4
Methodology . . . . .	6
Findings . . . . .	8
Discussions/Conclusions . . . . .	15
References . . . . .	16

## INTRODUCTION

There is a rampant problem with law enforcement officers plaguing America today. The problem affects, directly or indirectly, every facet of an officer's being whether he/she realizes it or not. This problem is physical fitness, or the lack thereof.

The public looks to its law enforcement officers as the unofficial ambassadors to its communities as they deter crime from entering and seek out crime from within. The image of sculptures and paintings representing law enforcement are of tall, slim, well groomed, officers helping the small child find his/her way back home. The laughable side of these examples are large, portly officers with coffee and doughnut in hand, standing watch to thwart crime, meanwhile increasing his chance of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and a host of other health problems stemming from a poor diet and no exercise.

Everyone likes to poke fun of the police and their love affair with the local doughnut shop. The sad truth is that it is not necessarily the cliché of doughnuts, but more of McDonald's cheese burgers that are available in a multitude of sizes. The Taco Bell stands ready and willing to serve up triple sized portions of cholesterol that would provoke many people into becoming a vegetarian.

Law enforcement officers are often judged in part or in whole on their first impressions. If this first impression is of a "Cop" with a belly that restricts or impairs his or her ability to see his/her shoes, then an impression of a fat, lazy slob comes to mind. Many suspects have stated that they have "sized" an officer up as soon as he leaves his vehicle and have made the decision to fight or run

based on an officer's physical appearance. If that appearance is one of fitness and strength a more cooperative attitude is often gained.

The excuse the author hears frequently is that many departments are unable to give little, if any, break for lunch, thus resulting in bad eating habits. Often, that lunch break is on night shift when the only restaurant open is a fast food venue. However many establishments have recognized America's need for healthy dining and to stay in business, have offered more healthy choices for a variety. Today most eating choices are up to the officer.

To the rescue of the fat officer is his/her department. Most do not openly encourage their officers to eat poorly or cease any fitness programs they might have started in the academy. But neither do they encourage a healthy diet or give any type of incentive for officers who work out to maintain a level of fitness.

In doing so they negatively reinforce the behavior that fat and unfit is acceptable. Law enforcement administrators often view a physically fit officer as "gung-ho" or somehow working out "for a fight" and they are correct. This expression is looked upon as negative but the overwhelming evidence points out that if any officer is in trouble they would rather have a fit, strong back up unit arrive than "someone who is going to suffer a heart attack while coming to my aid" as Lois Pilant referred to in an interview in her article [Spotlight on Physical Fitness](#).

The question behind this research is this: Why do departments fail to encourage their officers to be physically fit? This research paper will set out to show the need for an incentive program to motivate the officers of the Pasadena ISD Police Department to work out to achieve and maintain a good fitness level.

This research paper will show through a survey and interviews, that Pasadena ISD Police Officers would volunteer for a physical fitness program and submit themselves to fitness tests, in order to facilitate these fitness incentives. A review of articles and literature will be used for this paper to show model programs compared to disadvantages in documented workman's compensation claims and disability paid out by departments. Many agencies require a physical fitness test to gain employment with the department but no testing or incentive to stay in the shape they were hired at; in essence saying that one only has to be in shape to get a job, not to keep one. This trend is disturbing. This paper particularly affects the author, who has stood on both sides of this fence. The intended outcome of this research paper will show, through interviews, that Pasadena ISD officers will feel more productive and more efficient if they are encouraged by the department to be in good physical condition. Overall it is the author's intent to create and implement this program as a policy within the Pasadena ISD Police Department. Less stress and more organization are traits any department would pay, and will pay, to streamline efficiency. The patrol officer is the backbone of any agency and if the backbone can't bend to tie its own shoes, something is amiss.

The research is also intended to show several models that any department can seriously look into. Fear that the field of law enforcement as a whole will not be affected by this paper is valid. Frankly, working out is just that, work. It is a life saving endeavor, as "the life you save may be your own." The author does anticipate to find that this research will be one more piece of the "fitness

reinforcement pie” to assist departments and agencies in laying a foundation that officers want to work out, but just need a little encouragement.

The benefits of this paper will show a physically fit officer is one who thinks clearer and acts with more prudence as a result. Officers who train with weights or, more especially, martial arts, or any valid program are better trained to act decisively and ,if injured, are more likely to return to duty sooner.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For this portion of the paper this author has consulted a wide variety of Departments and institutions to draw information from. Most of the information from departments are samples or working fitness programs and the particular incentives given to inspire officers to exercise in order to enhance their job performance and their overall health.

The White Bear Lake Police Department, Minnesota State Patrol, and the Massachusetts Criminal Justice Training Center (Agha 2001). This article focused on voluntary fitness training by officers of these two agencies and the mandatory testing after they had volunteered. Hennesy, (2001) describes a similar program in which officers are reimbursed for exercise time. This encompasses a program developed by the Boca Raton Police, and Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

Pilant ,(The Police Chief ,1995) focuses on the benefits of physical fitness in police work in regards to mental clarity and better focus. In agencies cited there are those that have mandatory fitness testing for officers and the main

points stress the need for a fitness program both with individual officers and with department sponsored programs although not including any models.

A federal policy (sec. 223 FW8 USFW policy) from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service dictates how their program of fitness standards for individual agents will be implemented, monitored, documented, and supervised. The program also specifies how fitness areas will be constructed and what equipment will be acquired and maintained in each individual post. This article addresses workman's compensation and reimbursements for agents maintaining a gym membership.

Kaplan and Barrett (1991) however found why a program would not be accepted by the Chicago Police Department . It speaks of overweight officers within the Chicago Police Department and how they fear physical requirements would be used as disciplinary tools The literature also relates the requirements of police recruits which is rather stringent with timed runs to be completed and daily regimens of physical training.

The Cooper Institute in Dallas, Texas is an organization world renowned for it's sports medicine programs and began assisting law enforcement in researching physical fitness tests. Since starting this relationship, the institute has redefined hiring practices of departments nationwide in regards to fitness standards in hiring. They provide programs in health and wellness, legal guidelines and professional testimony, as well as many procedural and fitness related articles and manuals to assist agencies in their quest for a sound fitness test. A discussion of anaerobic testing as compared to job task-specific testing will be reviewed with the assistance of this article of frequently asked questions.



This resource will produce the backbone of the paper in-so-much-as they are the pinnacle for standards testing and on-going fitness programs.

A statistical print out from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement that includes a count of Florida departments that have active fitness programs within their agencies cites mandatory fitness programs, voluntary fitness programs and programs that are instituted as a condition of employment. The statistics cover a broad spectrum of agencies in Florida to include State, Local, County, correctional, educational, and various other departments who reported to this survey. It should be noted that only statistical data about programs is found and no conclusive resulting evidence.

Finally, from the Law Enforcement Wellness Association, noted a plethora of health problems associated with out of shape and unhealthy diet/and non-existent fitness habits of the average police officer in America today. It is written by Dr. Violanti and discussed the declining health of American police officers as it relates to their eating habits and irregular shift work. Officers are tasked with eating high fat meal on-the-go and are subject to reduced establishments to dine at during late hours. Poor sleep habits combined with a reduced desire to exercise results in out of shape policemen and women.

## **METHODOLGY**

“Why Should I” is the supporting theme of this paper, identifying that a problem exists and that officers have little or no encouragement to fix it. More especially, they are outwardly encouraged to ignore it and make it even worse. The Pasadena ISD Police Department continually requires more and more from the same amount of officers from one year to the next. Thus continually taking

away the time they will spend with their families until there is no perceived time for them to leave the house and run or get to the gym.

The author believes that if the Pasadena ISD Police Department enacted the three following incentives with the proposed monitoring systems, they would field a healthier, clearer thinking and more productive officer.

First, for the department to provide a place to exercise. The Pasadena ISD Police Department is currently in the process of planning a new office in a new building and I believe that we should provide a fitness area open and accessible twenty-four hours a day.

Secondly, to immediately start a program that pays three hours of “additional hours” pay to each officer who voluntarily engages in a regulated exercise program. The “extra pay” would be straight time hours and would not compensate for all of an officers work out time but might initially. To monitor this program an officer would have to submit to a bi-annual physical fitness test that would be determined and regulated by the Chief of Police or his designee.

Finally, the author proposes that the Pasadena ISD Police Department reimburse fifty percent of incurred costs from any gym membership or martial arts or similar program and again progress must be tested. Through martial arts programs, documentation of achieved belts would be kept and monitored. Other programs that did not have a “self monitoring” portion would be subject to the departments physical fitness testing.

The author has watched and monitored several area departments as well as the Pasadena ISD Police Department and watched their Officers get fatter and

fatter over the years. The author researched this subject through this paper and have found several examples from which to draw from.

Through the research, It was found that many agencies; Local, State and Federal, who have implemented voluntary and mandatory programs and all share the common thread. This commonality is to have a testing program and meticulous training records to help support their programs. These programs have stood the test of time and are evidenced in departments of all sizes and jurisdictions. This is proof that the programs are readily implemented and more essentially, they work.

The measurements are small in nature as the author has observed his 24 person department grow more and more out of shape over the last decade. The author interviewed 15 Officers who echo the sentiment: they are not given any incentive to stay fit and indeed are almost encouraged to become fat. This is true in that high school officers, in an effort to be kept on campus, have to stay on campus and are not given their unpaid half hour of lunch to eat. Moreover they are allowed to eat cafeteria meals for free in an effort to have their presence in the cafeteria during the lunches. All high school officers interviewed admitted gaining fat weight while initially being assigned there.

Finally, a survey was completed of Pasadena ISD officers in an effort to ascertain if this fitness program would be accepted or even popular.

## FINDINGS

In conducting the interviews for this paper, a common theme ran through almost all conversations and many articles. Why should I? This question is why this paper is so titled. What reason do officers have in staying physically fit once they are employed by any agency? In polling 15 officers in the Pasadena ISD Police Department, only 2 have been involved in physical altercations they felt were affected by their fitness levels. Consequently they felt their fitness levels were lacking as to adequately control their affray the way they wanted. In neither action was the level of force overused. However both officers felt that had their suspects resisted any harder, they would have stopped the suspect with less force, had they been in shape.

This is a disturbing, but not uncommon, situation. While interviewing multiple officers, most felt that being in “good shape” was essential for law enforcement officers. Only half of these officers said that they worked out regularly and only two stated that they had a schedule that they adhered to.

These same officers stated that if an officer was not physically fit, that that officer would not provide adequate “back up”. They also felt that “More necessary force” might have to be employed to make the arrest because the officer might not be able to physically overcome an assailant that is fighting them.

These same officers felt that their agency did not effectively promote fitness and did, in their opinion, discourage officers from being physically fit. This discouragement came in many forms. Some officers felt that since their leadership was out of shape they would not understand a subordinate’s desire to be fit. Some felt that the endless amount of “junk food” readily assessable was

indicative of poor health habits. Others believed that there was plenty of incentive to be unhealthy such as the ability to work long hours and the perceived unavailability of healthy places to eat just naming two.

In an article by David Kaplan and Todd Barrett (1991), they wrote that members of the Chicago Police Department believed that if there were a mandate to be physically fit, they would be disciplined and possibly fired for not adhering to the program.(1) This reason has been voiced in the past but was not much of a concern during the author's survey. The article went on to say that officers wished to have the incentive of working out "on company time". An example was given from the San Diego (CA) Police Department in the same article from above who shared fears of the author's interviewees in that they did not believe out of shape officers provided "the best cover"(1).

The author looked at different models of law enforcement fitness programs such as the White Bear Lake Police Department . According to Marisa Agha (2001) this department has a voluntary fitness program and mandatory bi-annual testing of those volunteers. The Minnesota State Patrol has instituted a voluntary fitness program for troopers and a mandatory program for those in leadership positions. (2)

Another model that the author is basing this paper on, and ultimately the proposal there in, is the Boca Raton Police. Based on the writing of Molly Hennessy-Fiske (2001) The Boca Raton Police pay up to three additional hours per week for officers to work out. (3)

An incentive like this is the request of almost every surveyed officer; why doesn't the Pasadena ISD Police Department encourage officers to stay fit?

Officers come in from one half hour to fifteen minutes early every day and stay late about the same to finish reports or back up officers of the next shift. They have to work an unpaid half hour for lunch and are expected to work a certain amount of overtime every week. On average a Pasadena ISD officer works four to six hours of overtime per week. With the exception of one, every patrol officer interviewed stated that they would volunteer for a program if given compensation.

To measure the progress of the participants, officers were told that they would have to undergo an annual or bi-annual fitness test. The same results were gathered. The officers asked did not even know what the test might encompass and only one asked. The rest were blindly willing to participate given this motivation. This accentuates the fact that officers want to be in shape and initially want to engage in a department fitness program.

Only four of fifteen officers interviewed currently exercise and of those who do, all state that they currently exercise more than three hours a week and would continue to do so even though they were only minimally compensated.

Another form of compensation would be that of partial reimbursement for membership in a gym or approved martial arts programs. Currently two Pasadena ISD officers spend almost five hundred dollars annually on a police only Combat Hopkido program. This program directly benefits the department in that both are trainers and pass limited common knowledge back to officers during in-service training. In the Pasadena Independent School District there are five high schools with various weight rooms. It has been argued in the past, within the Pasadena ISD Police Department, that these weight rooms were sufficient

and officers were given unrestricted access twenty four hours a day. In speaking with two Pasadena ISD sports trainers, they indicated that for overall fitness, these high school weight rooms were not ideally suited. They were more geared toward high school football programs. The high school weight rooms are designed for high school athletes who seek to gain weight and are under constant supervision. Most officers surveyed wished to lose weight and would not be supervised by a trainer. Thus these sites would not be conducive to this program and may very well induce injuries.

There were only three concerns voiced during interviews with supervision and officers concerning this proposal. The first related to workman's compensation if an officer was injured while exercising. This response was specific to the Pasadena Independent School District. An officer would be covered by workman's compensation if injured during exercise, however, coverage by the PISD is lackluster at best. An officer receiving workman's compensation only receives eighty percent of his or her base pay. To make up the remaining twenty percent the officer must use sick time at two hours per day until that expires. Then vacation, then personal time and so forth. The officer only receives additional compensation if they pay for disability insurance. The Pasadena ISD Police Department does not have light duty and while an officer is on workman's compensation he or she cannot operate his or her take home patrol car. The officer cannot work overtime or any off-duty jobs. This is especially a hardship as almost all officers base their yearly income on "extra-job" money.

The second concern was monetary and was mainly directed at the reimbursement proposal. This was dismissed when the Chief of Police proposed designing an exercise room within the department and making martial arts programs part of the current in-service training budget.

The policy 223 FW 8 under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (2000) covers the previously mentioned concerns in this fitness and wellness policy.(4) U.S. Fish and Wildlife law enforcement agents are covered by workman's compensation and are provided on site exercise rooms unless none are available. They are then reimbursed for local gym costs.

The final concern was of officers putting unearned fitness time on their time sheets. The author believes this is a misguided concern in that any officer found misrepresenting time on his or her time sheet would be immediately suspended. They would then be investigated and charged with Falsifying a Government Document. An officer has more latitude in accurately documenting overtime and according to interviewee's would "be stupid" to attempt this.

Documentation would be kept in the individual officers personal training records however a supervisory review would be conducted at least annually.

Once an officer agrees to participate in this program, that officer would subject their self to an annual or bi annual physical fitness examination. The author, asking officers to choose one of two programs, surveyed this examination. The first was developed by The Cooper Institute Of Dallas. This an overall strength and endurance test consisting of a one and one half mile run in a time limit factored by age, maximum sit-ups in one minute, maximum push ups, a vertical jump, and a three hundred meter run for time. In explaining this test to



officers, they were confused as to why it would pertain to their job performance. In a paper published by Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent Michael Brooks paraphrasing Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 “As a result of this legislation the only defense an employer has when a facially neutral employment standard effectively discriminates against a protected group is by proving the standard is job related for the position in question and consistent with business necessity.”(5)

This section was paramount in the author’s determination that a job specific physical fitness test would be the correct direction for supervisory documentation. The interviews showed that a test should be determined after this policy went into affect so that officers would have a direct input on their own testing.

Common job tasks of the Pasadena ISD Police Department are prolonged sprints of 100 meters or more, multiple stair climbing, fence climbing, and pushing vehicles for short distances just to name a few.

Overall this program was well accepted and even created excitement around the ranks.

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion the author believes that this program will be widely accepted in the Pasadena ISD Police Department. The survey seems to indicate this fact extensively. If in fact the Pasadena ISD Police Department were to adopt this policy the author believes that a more conditioned, more developed officer would be the result.

Many departments have neglected to help officers in this forum and as a result could face dire consequences. The consequences range from a possible excessive use of force to health problems with officers to a failure to train. The related health problems with nor being fit exist presently at the Pasadena ISD Police Department as have been shown above.

Officers surveyed are quoted as being called “health freaks”, “health nuts” and being accused of training to more effectively fight an assailant. These are almost becoming terms of endearment as these “health nuts” are called upon more and more to “assist the officer” as back up and as an example for their department in recruiting programs or other public appearances. Why should these officers be ridiculed? The author has experienced this ridicule and continues to struggle with those who do not share his drive and motivation.

Overall the acceptance of this program is very encouraging and it is the authors opinion that this concept can and will be implemented successfully within the Pasadena ISD Police Department.

## REFERENCES

- Kaplan, David A. /Barrett, Todd "The finest of the fattest" Newsweek Magazine  
(December 1991)
- "Health and fitness program for law enforcement officers" 223 FW8 U.S. Fish and  
Wildlife policy
- Pilant, Lois "Physical Fitness" The Police Chief\_(August 1995)
- Hennessy, Molly "For Boca Raton's Police, It pays to exercise" Palm Beach Post  
(October 2001)
- Agha, Marisa "Police Face Fitness Duty" Saint Paul Pioneer Press\_(August 2001)
- Brooks, Michael E. FBI Academy "Law Enforcement Physical Fitness Standards  
Title VII"
- The Cooper Institute "Procedure and sequencing of physical fitness tests in law  
enforcement"
- The Cooper Institute "Common Questions regarding physical fitness programs,  
tests and standards for public safety."