

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

**Implementing Crossfit: A Fitness and Wellness
Program for the Austin ISD Police Department**

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ABSTRACT

Cardiovascular diseases being the leading causes of death in the law enforcement community is one of the most important reasons to implement a physical fitness/wellness program. Not only will it help to combat cardiovascular issues, it will help decrease absenteeism, increase productivity, and improve morale of the officers. By implementing CrossFit as the fitness and wellness program for Austin Independent School District Police Department, it will assist officers in obtaining optimal health by combining interval training and nutrition.

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INTRODUCTION

The decline of fitness and wellness among those in law enforcement is an indisputable fact (Quigley, 2008). The law enforcement profession can be a very physically, as well as psychologically, demanding line of work. Due to the continuous exposures to high levels of stress, poor nutrition, and lack of physical activity, police officers are more vulnerable to lifestyle related diseases, such as obesity and cardiovascular disease. The physical ability of a police officer is essential to his or her survival. In order to be physically able to perform, one must be fit, well, and healthy.

As a standard policy, most police departments have a maintenance program for their firearms, patrol cars, and other equipment, and this shows that they see the importance of making sure that equipment is kept up to standards. It should then make sense that a regular maintenance program for the officers, such as a Crossfit wellness program, be part of the police agency's maintenance program. In reviewing the consequences of the lack of physical fitness and wellness, not only has there been a loss of respect by the general public but the possibility of an officer getting injured on the job is much greater. Maintaining a healthy workforce by providing a fitness and wellness program can reduce the absenteeism among officers, which, in turn, will reduce health care costs and lower overall health insurance premiums. Out of shape officers pose a danger to both themselves and others. Another very important factor is the mentality of an officer. If an officer has been educated with the proper health and nutrition, they will be much more alert while on the job. An officer's response time can be the determining factor in a particular situation, so their mental and physical state should be a priority. Thomas and Means (as cited in Walton, 2003) found that this can

also help minimize the rate of liability claims. Departments are sure to see better overall job performance, which would increase the morale of the officers (as cited in Walton, 2003).

A police officer can be in a sedentary situation, but within a split second, they may be involved in an altercation that would increase their heart rate to a significant level. This can have serious effects on an individual's body, which is why a physical fitness program should consist of the use of constantly varying functional movements at a high intensity. Fitness is only one part of the program; it must also include wellness, particularly since wellness examines fitness protocol, diet, and nutrition.

The police officer who is unfit or not mentally prepared for duty has a negative impact not only for individual officer, but for the community he serves as a whole. Officers who are working under severe and chronic stress are at greater risk for events or calls for service going wrong. These errors in judgment, such as accidents and overreaction, can compromise or jeopardize public safety. It could also bring significant liability costs to the organizations (as cited in Walton, 2003). Austin Independent School District (ISD) Police Department should incorporate CrossFit, a fitness and wellness program using functional movements, along with teaching the importance of nutrition during scheduled work hours to keep officers fit and healthy.

POSITION

Police departments are in need of a wellness program that is functional and simple to do. According to The Cooper Institute (2008), wellness is needed to improve the quality of life of an individual. With wellness, a police officer could increase work productivity and happiness while on duty and at home. If everything about health could

be measured, it would show a continuum starting with “Sickness”, then to “Wellness”, then “Fitness” (Glassman, 2006). When defining wellness, it can be simply said that if one is not sick, then one is considered well, and this can be determined by blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides, and body fat measurements. When defining fitness, it has been said that it is the ability to perform daily tasks with vigor and alertness without undue stress or fatigue. One should also be able to handle above average physical encounters in an emergency. What can be accomplished by being fit is the health related components, such as cardio-respiratory fitness, lower body fat composition, muscular endurance, absolute strength, and flexibility. Then there are motor related components, such as good coordination, agility, and speed.

The Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) and the American Heart Association (AHA) reported that the leading cause for death in the U.S. is cardiovascular disease (CVD) in both men and women (The Cooper Institute, 2008). This also includes coronary artery disease (CAD), which is the buildup of fatty plaque in the coronary arteries that leads to the heart. It is when this plaque ruptures or breaks away that a heart attack may occur. Approximately 1.1 million heart attacks occur, on average, in the U.S. Also, over 90% of them happen while at rest. There are approximately 525,000 deaths resulting from the heart attacks; this accounts for 52% of all cardiovascular deaths (American Heart Association, n.d.).

A risk factor for coronary artery disease is an abnormal cholesterol level. The American Heart Association reported that over 100 million Americans have this issue, and many of them totally unaware of it (The Cooper Institute, 2008). The American Heart Association report also showed that to lower Lipoprotein (LDL) Cholesterol, which

are the bad levels, one should increase their physical activity, manage stress, decrease the intake of saturated and hydrogenated fat, decrease body fat percent, and increase the intake of soluble fiber and foods with plant sterols (Lapum, 2003).

A second major risk factor for coronary artery disease is hypertension, stroke, and congestive heart failure. There are approximately 73 million Americans who suffer with this silent killer (The Cooper Institute, 2008). To combat this disease, moderate to high levels of cardio-respiratory fitness is recommended, along with a proper diet. Pre-diabetes/diabetes is another factor for coronary artery disease, and it affects approximately 21 million Americans, many of which are unaware of their condition. Two hundred thousand Americans die from complications of diabetes each year (The Cooper Institute, 2008). The way to improve diabetes is to increase physical activity, decrease body fat, and have a prudent diet.

According to the AHA, CDC, ACSM, and the Surgeon General's Office, having a sedentary lifestyle is the major independent risk factor for coronary heart disease (The Cooper Institute, 2008). Also, according to the personal wellness course at Texas Woman University, healthy officers need 15 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity three to five days a week (Jordening, 2011). Chronic stress is another factor, and it has an adverse impact on blood pressure, which will lead to a risk of coronary artery disease. Chronic stress is a state of ongoing physiological arousal. Chronic stress often occurs when the human body is attacked with overwhelming stressors at one time, and the nervous system does not have a chance to go into a decompression mode to relax. Officers often have the ability to handle acute stress but not chronic stress (The Cooper Institute, 2008). Police officers are repeatedly answering stressful calls, day in

and day out, one after another, which, over time, wears on an officer's strength and their ability to remain strong in high-tension situations.

A study by the National Center for Health Statistics (2010) reported that a male can expect to live to 74.1 years, and a female is expected to live to 79.3 years. Then a report stated that a police officer is expected to live to 66 years (Violanti, 1996). A study of statistical measures called relative risk reported that an inactive officer has a 2.2 greater risk of a heart attack than an officer that is in a fitness program (Collingwood, Hoffman, Smith, 2004). If the inactive officer has a second risk factor, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol, the rate goes up to 6.6 times.

The type of fitness program recommended is CrossFit. CrossFit workouts are "constantly varied, high-intensity, functional movements" (Glassman, 2006, p. 18). Functional movements are universal motor recruitment patterns, and they are compound movements, i.e. they are multi-joint. In short, they are natural movements that an officer can do every day. CrossFit is a core strength and conditioning program that was developed to enhance one's competency at all physical tasks. This program is effective for military, police personnel, firefighters, and all types of athletes. CrossFit is a complete program and will also assist with the development of diet strategies (Glassman, 2006).

When examining an officers daily activity, it shows how much core strength and functional movements are used. Officers get in and out of patrol cars multiple times a day, so programming the air squat into a workout helps build and condition legs for that movement (Glassman, 2006). If an officer is being attacked by an offender and needs to push away to make space, the programming for that action will be pushups or the

push-press movement. If an officer's partner is on the other side of a 6-foot fence and needs help, but there is no gate, then conditioning skills, such as pull-up and push-ups, would help the officer get over the fence.

The reason for using functional movements is that they are mechanically sound, which makes it safe for anyone to do. Also, these movements are used to rehabilitate injuries. Using a program like this is proven to be safe and effective (Glassman, 2006). With the demands of busy days of running from call to call, meetings, and just the fact that it is easier to go to a fast food restaurant, today's officers do not have good nutrition. Of course, with any wellness program, one would need to have a nutrition segment attached to it. With a proper nutrition program, it will enhance the way officers perform on the job. When there is a good balance of fat, carbohydrates, and protein, it will enhance efforts in weight loss, muscle growth, and mental alertness. The issues that may occur when a diet is out of balance, such as if it was 70% carbohydrates, 20% protein, and 10% fat, may increase the risk of cancer, diabetes, and heart disease (Glassman, 2006).

An officer can ensure that he is getting proper nutrition by packing an ice chest for lunch and snacks. This should be comprised of food that will satisfy caloric, protein, and fat requirements. When an officer packs his or her own lunch and snacks, it also helps the officer avoid times of extreme hunger, and it helps stop the urge for fast food. Also having food available at all times ensures that it is easier to keep a consistent blood sugar level, which provides instant energy to the brain and muscles when needed.

When looking at the Austin ISD police department, it was found that in order to be employed by the department, potential officers had to pass a physical fitness test. Once hired, officers are expected to maintain those standards and are tested bi-annually. The officers, though, are on their own in finding a wellness program and in finding time to workout on their own.

Why a school officer should be fit for duty is a question that would be better answered by walking onto a high school campus. By taking a walk around a campus, an observer could find that a lot of the students are just as big as, or bigger than, most adults on campus. It also can be said that most students have a higher energy level than most adults. This alone can make it challenging for an officer to keep pace with this group to protect or keep in line. A physically fit officer will think clearer and act with more prudence to combat or overcome those issues.

The overall health of the police officer should be a concern of the department and is an issue that needs to be looked into. As far as heart related issues, Thomas and Means (as cited in Walton, 2003) reported that 10% to 50% of officers have heart disease, 20% to 50% of officers are overweight or obese, 20% to 35% of officers have high cholesterol, and 4% to 15% suffer from hypertension. The report also addressed issues that are non-heart related: it stated that 20% to 25% suffer some sort of orthopedic injury, 15% to 25% officers have back problems, and 8% to 25% suffer from psychological issues (as cited in Walton, 2003).

A benefit to the police officer and the department is that better health of the officers will reduce the sick time that is used by the officers. Also, there will be fewer on the job injuries experienced in the department. Departments will also see better morale

and see the performance of the officers increase over time. The officer who feels better will be happier while on and off duty. As a result, the various contacts the officers have with the public may be more productive and professional (as cited in Walton, 2003).

A study from Thomas and Means (as cited in Walton, 2003) indicated a perceived 8% improvement in health, 26% improvement in morale, and a decrease in absenteeism within police departments that had a fitness program. It also stands to reason that if society expects officers to make split-second decisions, officers should not be in poor health. If they have to make that decision under stress and in physical duress, the department should give them the opportunity and the tools to make the right one. If an officer is in an altercation and they are not in a condition to handle the suspect, there are a host of issues that could occur. The officer could overuse force in hands-on incidents, when the officer feels the loss of energy during the altercation. Another issue would be the suspect overpowering the officer and taking the weapons from the officer and using the weapons against the officer.

It is proposed that if an officer is required to keep up their fitness level, then the police department should provide the means and the time to do so. With most officers stationed on a campus with access to a workout facility, the CrossFit workouts would be ideal for them to do. Officers could come in early or stay late to do their work out, and the police department would allow three hours a week to do so. In the wellness program, the officers who participate will undergo testing on a regular basis and have a supervisor do spot checks to ensure that they are actually working out. With time constraints, such as overtime work and out of pocket expenses being an issue for

officers not being able to work out, it would be a benefit to the department and the community that these officers take time in their duty day to workout.

COUNTER POSITION

Even though it is best for officers to get and stay in shape, officers may not participate in a fitness program. They may be lazy and think they are in good enough shape to handle any situation. This reasoning is common because the work that is done on the Austin ISD campuses is mostly non-physical.

Although it is shown that most policing on the Austin ISD campuses is non-physical, it is the possibility of a situation getting out of hand where an officer can get caught off guard. Even though an officer may be on a slow or low activity campus, they still spend a lot of time on their feet doing foot patrol in and outside of the school. Also, in the event of an active shooter on campus, the officer may have to cover multiple buildings or cover a large area in order to locate a shooter. With that said, an officer has the entire campus depending on them to handle that situation and keep them safe.

Having time to work out is another issue that would need to be addressed. The Austin ISD police department has a mandate that an officer must be on campus when at all possible. With that said, CrossFit is flexible and can be done in any area of the campus before, after, or during school hours. An officer can use the facility on campus to do the workouts. Most CrossFit workouts are done with body weight, so doing air squats, pushups, or situps can be done in just about any open space.

Another argument is the lack of funds available to pay for the officer to work out during regular duty hours. With the status of the economy today, there are constant cuts being made to budgets, so finding the money to support this type of fitness

program may be a problem. Also, there is concern about accountability of the workout hours, since there will be no supervision for each and every officer, three hours per week, 52 weeks a year. This would be another increase in cost that the budget will not allow. Additionally, there will be no supervision at the workouts to make sure they are safe. This is another cost that would have to be added to the budget, which is not accounted for.

The arguments for not implementing a fitness and wellness program as stated are often focused on the cost involved. However, police departments should realize the most costly factors that they are faced with are on-duty injuries, the overuse or abuse of sick leave, and unforeseen medical retirements as a result of illness or injury. When police departments show that they are committed to a fitness and wellness programs, like the one being proposed, most insurance companies will offer lower rates (Quigley, 2008). Also finding funds to send line officers, instead of first line supervisors, to training schools to get them certified as trainers will save on the cost of supervising those in program. These officers can do their workouts and watch over and keep track of other officers that are working out. This could help to ensure that the program will be able to be successful.

Another concern is that officers may feel that if they are not doing or progressing well, this could be a tool to get them removed from the force. Additionally, there may be issues from unions or police associations not supporting a fitness program because of it mandating officers to work out. There is a standing policy already in effect concerning an officer's fitness to perform their duty. This program will help the officers prepare for the fitness test that must be passed.

RECOMMENDATION

The law enforcement community needs to examine its physical fitness and wellness training and long-term health programs to ensure an efficient and competent force. When an individual enters the police academy, there is a strong physical fitness program that will get officers ready to do their jobs. However, after graduation, most agencies do not offer programs to maintain a high level of fitness for the officer for the length of their careers. A way of making sure that an officer has long lasting wellness habits begins with incorporating a fitness program within the police department. The physical training should be based on constantly varied, high-intensity, functional movements, which are used in CrossFit. There are many situations during a typical police officer's daily routine in which an officer must perform multiple, skilled movements in a short time period of time or put together a group of movements that need to be done as fast as possible in a hostile environment. Most CrossFit workouts are designed to mirror these task and time specific events.

In order for officers to get into a fitness program, there needs to be an incentive. Giving officers three hours a week while on duty in order to workout would be that incentive. The flexibility of working out around an officer's busy schedule can be helpful and could be monitored by the supervisor in the area. The three hours can be paid in overtime or by comp-time. Since the Austin ISD police department already has a physical fitness policy, the officers in the workout program would adhere to the same standards and testing. The workout program will work hand and hand with that policy and will make passing the physical fitness test easier. The physical fitness test will also serve as a gauge to how much an officer is working out on his or her own.

Nutrition plays a critical role in a police officer's fitness. Because of long hours, high calls for service, eating on the run, and shift work, many officers have developed poor eating habits. Now that it is known that cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of law enforcement officers, it makes sense that police departments provide the wellness programs to help officers make healthy nutrition choices and staying physically fit. This will add years to their career and ensure a high quality of life with the family (Quigley, 2008; The Cooper Institute, 2008)

By implementing CrossFit as a physical fitness program, the Austin ISD Police Department will give its officers the ability to take control of their own health. Because law enforcement officers are held to a higher standard, this will allow them to perform at a higher level. With that said, it can also provide opportunities to affect the lives of the people the law enforcement officer comes in contact with daily. The officer can become a role model for others, especially the students who are within the educational system at the Austin ISD.

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