

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD  
LAW ENFORCEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

**PHYSICAL FITNESS  
A STEP TOWARD SURVIVAL**

**A Policy Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Professional Designation  
Graduate, Management Institute**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The physical fitness and physical ability of a Police officer is paramount to survival. A Police Officer at any moment of their patrol shift may be required to engage in a life and death struggle. This research project is to outline the physical requirements to be eligible for hire by the Tarleton State University Police Department. This project will also address the requirements of a competency test for officers after employment to maintain a healthy and physically fit police force.

By following industry standards of established policy and case law requirements for physical fitness assessments, the Tarleton State University Police Department can develop a program to enhance the physical conditioning of our officers. This enhanced physical wellness program will enable our officers to meet the ever-present danger of a physical confrontation and the emotional stresses that are inherent to the law enforcement profession.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this research project is to address the need of mandatory physical fitness training for police officers. The need for physical conditioning is obvious not only for the officer but for the public they are hired to protect and serve. The physical ability and physical fitness of a police officer is paramount to survival. Police officers are dying every day from physical confrontation and health related illness.

Police officers are expected to be able to protect and serve without notice. An officer could be required to chase on foot for an extended distance, catch, and arrest a suspected violator. The catch could require the officer to physically fight and subdue the violator. The arrest should be with control and within the Use of Force Policy that is our industry standard. The physical demands and the very nature of police occupations result in extremely high rates of Officer Injury and Illness.

This research project is to provide current and relative information and material for the Administration of Tarleton State University, Chief Robert G. Hooper, and our police officers to make the choice to implement and support a fitness program. The action required to make the physical condition program work is as follows: First, the Administration demonstrates its support with resources required for mandatory fitness. Second, the Tarleton State University Police Department will implement a written policy that challenges and encourages our Officers to get physically fit. Third, the Officers commit to the programs and strive to be the best that they can be for their entire career.

The information provided in this research project will come from current reports, journals, books, and policy of modern police departments. The information contained in the referenced material demonstrate the need of industry standards that are required to be met when starting a mandatory physical fitness program. The physical assessments must have real life application to actual job requirements and show occupational standards. The research will provide information on case law and Federal ADA laws that support and regulate mandatory physical assessment.

The final outcome of this project is that Tarleton State University will have a written physical fitness program policy for its department. By implementing such a policy will help maintain and improve the physical condition and overall health for our department. Physical fitness standards coupled with our education standards and mission statement will provide the community with what they expect; Police officers trained and physically capable of handling any situation at any time and surviving to serve and protect another day.

### **Historical, Legal and Theoretical Context**

During the past 2 years our department has had several incidents of loss time injuries and illness. Two officers have had heart related ailments after engaging in foot pursuits of suspects. One of the officers required on site CPR to sustain life and the use of Care-flight to transport him to a major cardiac hospital. This incident alone caused emotional distress and resource problems for our department. We have had several other minor injuries that have resulted in loss time and hospitalization. The majority of our incidents are compounded from the very nature of police work, poor eating habits, periods of being sedentary, going into a fight or flight scenario with little warning.

To accomplish police tasks, officers may have to run, jump, wrestle, shoot, swim and/or punch at a given time (Ness 75). By having a tailored physical fitness program for each officer

they can avoid the minor injuries and be able to recover quicker from major injuries that could occur.

"Police work kills you from within: not usually with bullets or knives but by the accumulated effects of sleeplessness, bad food, and a host of stress-related illnesses (Reintzell vii)."

Currently several of our officers are extremely overweight, have blood pressure problems and other health concerns. The vast majority of police officers succumb to heart disease, cancer, stroke, and other natural deaths at a much younger age than the average civilian population (Reintzell 39). These conditions and the fact that the average age of suspects remains constant as our officers get older compounds the issue and should be reason enough for the Tarleton State University Police Department to enact a mandatory physical requirement to maintain overall physical fitness for our officers.

The campus community at Tarleton State University has the following student population characteristics. "It is composed primarily of single young adults between the ages of 17 and 23. Add to that a propensity for these students to consume alcohol in social settings, and special problems are likely to occur (Nichols 18)". It is clear that the adverse effects of the lack of fitness are overwhelming, while the positive benefits are often overlooked. Being physically fit diminishes stress, promotes self-esteem, improves firearms accuracy, increases an officers confidence in confrontations, which makes him/her more effective with impact weapons and defensive tactics, and generally improves their quality of life (Nichols 38). The fact that we have officers that are being injured just in the in-service training of the complex defensive tactics

stresses the need for increased physical conditioning of the Tarleton State University police officers.

### **Review of Literature or Practice**

Jacksonville State University located in Jacksonville Alabama has approximately 8,000 students and some 600 faculty and staff. The Police Department of Jacksonville State University with 17 sworn police officers is comparable to Tarleton State University in student population and demographics. The Jacksonville U.P.D. has a mandatory program and gives this policy statement:

#### **A. Rational**

Certain aspects of police work require exceptional and strenuous physical condition by police officers to effectively serve the community, protect themselves, and protect others. Physical condition has been demonstrated to be important at the Jacksonville State University due to many incidents, which have required officers to use force in effecting arrests. Officers have been required to run, use exceptional strength, and agile enough to control physically superior individuals. Good physical fitness for police personnel is directly job-related. Physical fitness is an important component of police recruit training as evidenced by physical training exercises and a pass/fail physical ability course in the Police Academy. As a minimum, this required physical condition is especially important to officers in the line of duty. Furthermore, good physical condition and good health promotes a positive appearance which is important to maintain a continuous

physical fitness training program which keeps officers in a healthy and fit condition.

#### B. Purpose

1. To provide UPD police personnel with the time, training, and equipment necessary to maintain good health and physical fitness.
2. To ensure that UPD police personnel are able to safely and effectively execute physical tasks that are required in the performance of routine police duties.
3. To ensure that police personnel maintain, through training and diet, a positive physical appearance, which exemplifies a professional image.

The Midland Police Department has also implemented a mandatory physical fitness program. The stated goals and objectives of this program should be the model that the Tarleton State University Department follows in writing a policy for the commissioned officers currently employed (Appendix 1). Deputy Chief Jerry Compton one of the co- authors to the Midland Police department program states that the best part of the program is that there are not any negative sanctions for the officers. Officers who demonstrate a willingness and effort to meet the standards are rewarded in several positive ways.

Officers are tested by a Physical fitness training coordinator. Who, would then custom tailor a fitness program to strengthen each individual officer if there was a weakness in a specific area of the overall fitness requirements. The required minimum standard of physical conditioning is 50% of the national average of ordinary citizens. There is a reward incentive system for improvement from the first assessment and for maintaining an expected goal of 80% of the national average.



Case law and industry standards support having realistic percentages as a goal or target area for fitness. All tests and evaluation methods must apply to the job requirement. A validation requirement of the assessment process is critical to the program. Thomas Collingwood, Ph.D., is an industry leader in the field of Physical Fitness that has conducted the research and has provided valuable information in his handbook: *Fitforce Administrators Guide*. Legal validity is measured in two parts: proof that what ever the tests measure is a quality that is job related and the proof that standards don't discriminate against protected classes such as women, racial minorities, older individuals, or individuals with disabilities (Collingwood 35; 1998, Pilant 84, Schofield 27).

### **Discussion of Relevant Issues**

The ultimate goal of any mandatory fitness program is to reduce costs caused by hiring and maintaining officers needed to operate a quality professional police department. It is important to point out that all the departments that started physical fitness programs for their officers have reported them a success (Morrow 8). Tarleton State University would be able to use the same standards of assessment for in-service training to screen new employee candidates helping to protect the Police department from civil liability. There is case law to support using physical assessments and making them a condition of employment for new recruits and for current officers (Schofield 29). In *Parker V. Metro D.C.*, the court states that a department may be guilty of " Deliberate Indifference" if the department does not take action to address the at risk issues that are a fact of survival to law enforcement officers today. To take it a step further, medical experts are testifying on behalf of " Out- of- Shape" officers injured on the job who are suing their department, not for workman's compensation claims, but rather for the big "Liability" money (Morrow 6).

The costs of starting such a program at Tarleton State University Police Department would be very minimal. The Department currently employs an officer that is a "qualified Physical Fitness Coordinator" who can tailor fit a physical fitness programs to individual officers (Rizenman 2). The University already provides access to some of the finest physical conditioning and strengthening equipment in the area. The department would only need to write the policy and implement the start up of a program. Scheduling could be handled to effectively cover the campus and provide on-duty-time for the officers to workout at a marginal cost of what the Department has spent in loss-time incidents in the last couple of years.

The necessity to provide the on-duty-time for workouts would give legal justification for making it a mandatory requirement and a condition of employment. Research and information provided at the Texas Womans University Wellness Center supports that a program with as little as three 30-minute aerobic workouts a week would greatly increase the physical condition of any person. By giving one- (1) hour three (3) times a week and implementing a staggered work shift on Tuesday through Thursday. Tarleton would not have to pay overtime and officers would in effect be on duty when they workout prior to or after their patrol shift ends.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

The purpose of this research project is to address the need of mandatory physical fitness training for police officers. The need for physical conditioning is obvious not only for the officer but for the public they are hired to protect and serve. The physical ability and physical fitness of a police officer is paramount to survival. It is proposed that our Department takes the necessary steps to install a mandatory wellness or fitness for duty program with a prorated pay incentive to encourage increased participation (Witczak 50).

We only have to look at our current officer's overall physical condition to realize that a voluntary program is not effective for our Department. Without a set goal and a required performance evaluation would place an unfair burden on the effectiveness of the individual officers workout (Ness 74). Only a few of our officers have the ability or knowledge to develop a fitness program and to monitor their performance in an objective format that would benefit the department and themselves.

By having a mandatory physical fitness program as a condition of employment with pay incentive attached to our merit raise this would greatly increase the willingness for participation. An example: is an Officers incentive if he/she meets minimum fitness standard of 50% is eligible for a merit raise. The officer that has a 65% fitness level receives an additional 1-% merit raise bonus after maintaining that level for a year. The officer that has an 80% fitness level receives an addition 2% merit raise bonus after maintaining that level for a year.

This program is needed to increase the ability of our officers to handle not only the physical demands associated with our profession but the mental stresses as well. A physical fitness program should be as important as firearms qualification and clean uniforms (Nichols 40). Several Police Departments and major corporations have found that health programs save money and prevent loss time incidents. Improving the health status of police officers should be considered an added bonus to departmental training; however, the primary reason for program initiation must explicitly relate physical fitness training to essential police tasks (Pizzurro 51).

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **MIDLAND POLICE DEPARTMENT**

#### **GENERAL ORDERS**

#### **CHAPTER 3**

##### **SECTION 11 MANDATORY PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAM**

###### **I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The Department's physical fitness program is directed to all Commissioned police officers employed by the Department. All officers are required to participate in the program. The intent is to have all officers involved in a physical training program that they maintain for the remainder of their career. All other personnel are encouraged to voluntarily participate and benefit from this program. The Training Division is responsible for the administration of the program.

###### **II. PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

###### **A. The primary goals of the Department are:**

1. To involve every officer in some type of physical, training program that the individual can stay with their entire career.
2. To provide training in fitness and wellness on a continuing basis. Officers are trained on different methods of obtaining and maintaining a desired level of fitness.
3. To increase the capacity to maintain balanced physical and mental health.
4. To increase the capacity to reduce job related injuries by being physically capable and flexible through increased stamina, strength and ability.
5. To enhance the capacity to maintain increased decision making skills in biologically and emotionally intense situations.

6. To increase survival skills in physical confrontations.
  7. To decrease the negative effects of stress and increase the quality of personal life,
  8. To improve the basic health level and reduce the use of sick leave, as well as increase the efficiency of professional life by increasing tolerance to fatigue.
  9. To reverse the negative effects of the traditional sedentary nature of police work that contributes to certain diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, lower back pain and obesity.
  10. To reduce premature termination of a productive work life.
  11. To increase self—confidence, contributing to greater job satisfaction and a positive work attitude.
  12. To field physically fit officers, both in appearance and demeanors thereby increasing citizen respect and confidence.
- B. The objective of the physical fitness program is to impact officers in four critical areas.
1. Increase or maintain a high aerobic capacity
  2. Increase or maintain good flexibility
  3. Increase or maintain good muscular strength
  4. Increase or maintain good muscular endurance

### **III. MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS**

- A. Prior to the first physical assessment test, all officers are required to have a physical examination. This is usually covered by the pre-employment physical. The examination is performed by a physician made available through and paid for by the City.
- B. The following is the recommended schedule for physical exams:

1. Officers over 40 years of age have a physical exam available to them every year on a voluntary basis.
  2. A physical exam is available to all officers on their 30th birthday and then again on their 35th birthday on a voluntary basis.
  3. Physical examinations may be made available to officers with a special need regardless of age. These examinations are handled by a case by case basis. The sequence for these examinations is request, justification, and authorization by the Chief of Police.
- C. Physical examinations that are paid for by the Department must be performed by a physician made available by the Department. Employees, who select a personal physician, are responsible for all fees incurred. There is no overtime paid for officers who have any part of the physical exam performed while off-duty.
- D. Officers scheduled for physical examinations are expected to appear at the scheduled time. Failure to appear for scheduled examinations is considered absence without leave and appropriate disciplinary action shall be taken.
- E. All officers must complete a medical history questionnaire and return it to the Physical Fitness Coordinator prior to the physical examination.

#### **IV. ASSESSMENT TESTING PROCEDURES**

- A. Employee testing, for program compliance, is conducted on a semi-annual basis, unless the individual is in remedial training or qualifies for incentive testing. The testing is conducted by the Training division and is coordinated/controlled by the Physical Training



Coordinator. All test results, prescribed individual, training programs, contractual agreements, and progress reports are maintained in the individual employees training file. Participation in the program is mandatory.

- B. The assessment test and norms to: the tests were adopted from the Institute for Aerobics Research in Dallas, Texas. They represent a data bank of 40,000 people. This assessment test was developed through years of intensive research. The test is designed to measure an individual's fitness in four areas: Aerobic capacity, flexibility, muscular strength, and muscular endurance.
- C. The test does not measure specific motor related functions that would be considered to be directly job related. The test does measure the individual's fitness level in each of the four listed areas. The test can then be used as an accurate prediction of how well the individual should be able to perform a number of jobs related tasks.
- D. Employees are tested in the following categories:
  - 1. Aerobic Power Test
  - 2. Flexibility (sit and reach]
  - 3. 1 minute push-ups
  - 4. 1 minute sit-ups
- E. The Assessment "Testing and Norms" portion of the program contain the norms for each exercise done in the assessment test. The far left column of the norms sheet for each exercise or activity Indicates the percentage of the population that an individual measures up to in that particular test. In the far right column, the

letters from top to bottom S (superior), E (excellent), G (good), F (fair), P (poor), and VP (very poor) indicate the level of fitness of the individual being tested. The minimum standards are based on the percentile for each test.

## **V. INCENTIVE AND AWARDS**

- A. As a reward for maintaining excellent physical conditioning and as an incentive to maintain that level of conditioning officers who do not go below the 75% level in the four categories are only required to take the assessment test once a year. If they fall below the 75% level in any of the four categories they are required to test in six months on the regular assessment schedule.
- B. In order to be eligible for the Physical Fitness Award, an officer must achieve 80 percentile in all Four categories. Once the Physical Fitness award has been earned, the individual officer must maintain an 80 percentile level to display the award on a uniform. The training division will maintain a program of fitness incentives to be determined after each assessment. The officer's lowest score in any of the physical areas determines the fitness level.

## **VI. REMEDIAL PROGRAM**

The remedial fitness program began with the October 1992 assessment and is in effect on any assessment after that date. Each officer with the Midland Police Department is asked to be at the 50% level in each of the four categories. Officers that fall below the 50% level in one or more of the categories are consulted by the Physical Fitness Coordinator and their immediate supervisor to:

- 1. Be notified of the area(s) that are below standard.

2. Be given notice that the officer is in remedial training until such time as the sub-standard area(s) are brought up to the 50% level.
  3. Develop a personalized fitness prescription with the Physical Fitness Coordinator to bring up the sub-standard area(s).
  4. Be given a remedial testing schedule of times that they are to be re—tested in the sub—standard areas to check their progress.
  5. Set realistic goals that are agreed upon by the officer and the Physical Fitness Coordinator. The goal of the remedial program will be for the officer to participate regularly in a fitness program prescribed by the Physical Fitness Coordinator, in order to be able to meet the 50% level at the next assessment period.
- D. Officers in the Remedial program will meet with the Physical Fitness Coordinator each month that they are in remedial. The purpose of this meeting will be to consult and test as to the effectiveness of their individual fitness program.
- E. Officers who fail to meet the 50% requirement on their scheduled fitness assessment, after participating in the monthly fitness consultations with the Physical Fitness Coordinator, will be assigned to report to the Physical Fitness Coordinator on a weekly basis. During the weekly fitness sessions the officer will work on his individual fitness program.

## **VII. PROMOTIONS AND INTERDEPARTMENTAL TRANSFERS**

The Midland Police Department Physical Fitness Program does not serve as a disqualifier for promotions or interdepartmental transfers. Any consideration that physical fitness does play in the promotion process or in interdepartmental transfers is specifically outlined in the General Orders Manual.

## **VIII. WORKOUT TIME**

On-duty workout time is left to the discretion of each commander. Because this department has such a strong emphasis on fitness, each commander is encouraged to adopt a liberal on-duty workout program that adapts to their manpower situation.

## **IX. CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES**

- A. Civilian employees are encouraged to make use of the MPD gym and the physical assessment program.
- B. Sworn and civilian employees are encouraged to participate in the City of Midland Wellness Program.

## **X. WORKER'S COMPENSATION**

The current worker's compensation policy applies to this program. If an officer is hurt while testing or when working out in the MPD gym while on duty they will be covered by workers Compensation. Injuries sustained while working out off-duty are not covered by Worker's Compensation. However, injuries are covered under the accident clause of the City insurance. This applies only to those who are members of the City of Midland group Insurance policy. For further information. Refer to the "City of Midland Personnel Handbook" and provisions of the insurance policy.