

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

**Mandatory Annual Fitness Testing for
Law Enforcement Officers**

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

**By
Mike Picha**

**Decatur Police Department
Decatur, Texas
September 2009**

ABSTRACT

Mandatory annual fitness testing for law enforcement officers is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because, in most agencies, there are no physical fitness criteria or annual fitness testing for the officers. Departments simply do a pre-hire physical test and then never do preventive testing later. The position of the researcher is that law enforcement agencies should provide a fitness criteria and an annual fitness test for law enforcement officers.

The types of information used to support the researcher's position included a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, along with speaking about fitness policies with a battalion chief for Euless Fire Department, a retired battalion chief for Grapevine Fire Department, and the currently serving fire chief for the Decatur Fire Department. The conclusion/recommendation drawn from this position paper is to make it mandatory for all Texas police departments to adopt physical fitness criteria and use the Huguley physical fitness test to determine each officer's health level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Counter Position	2
Position	5
Conclusion/Recommendation	7
References	9
Appendix	

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research paper is to present an argument for the implementation of a mandatory annual fitness testing program for law enforcement officers. The fact remains that most law enforcement agencies perform a pre-hire physical agility test but fail to implement any type of consistent mandatory physical fitness criteria or annual testing. Very few agencies spend any money on physical fitness that would keep their officers in physical shape but train countless hours on required or specialized training. Most agencies do not give the officers the awareness needed of the risks that they face by not taking better care of themselves. It is known that police work is very stressful occupation both on-duty and off-duty. Police work is also very sedentary at times, and the combination of high stress, poor health, and diet can prove deadly for most officers.

The reason for this position is law enforcement agencies should be concerned about officer fitness because of the affects on general health, longevity on the job, and work related stress issues that can be detrimental to officer's health and quality of life. Up to 20% of today's male law enforcement officers cannot perform physical tasks essential to the job, an, up to 95% of the females randomly tested in studies cannot perform tasks. In some areas, police academy physical demands have been lowered to graduate male and female recruits, and they are not tested again throughout their careers. The use of force critical incident data showed that lack of fitness leads to injuries and failure to respond effectively on duty (Remsberg, 2006). Law enforcement agencies should provide a fitness criteria and an annual fitness test for law enforcement officers.

COUNTER POSITION

Opposition to these claims is plentiful but can be centered into four main areas: cost, unions, liabilities, and age/gender issues. The first counterpoint is the cost of implementing a program. The initial cost is only the beginning of a rather long financial commitment. After a program has been established, more issues with expenses will arise. These issues are dealing with officers who fail the physical test, hiring a trainer to be on staff, providing gym membership, being sure all officers are allowed work time to participate in physical activities, and being prepared for any medical problems while officers are training.

The second counterpoint listed is police unions. Police unions can say that physical fitness standards cannot be mandatory. Through collective bargaining, union members can decide as a group what will be reasonable for physical standards or decide not to have a standard at all. Although police unions are not very prevalent in Texas, there are still police organizations such as the Combined Law Enforcement Attorneys' of Texas and the Texas Municipal Police Officers Association that will assist officers against mandatory physical fitness standards.

The third counterpoint will be the liabilities involved with making a mandatory physical fitness assessment for police officers. If an officer gets hurt, it is important to know who would pay for the medical care if they were training off-duty. In addition, if the officer dies during the mandatory physical fitness test, the law enforcement organization will be liable to pay benefits to the family and outcomes of lawsuits.

The last counter point will be the age/gender issues involving the mandatory physical fitness tests. Older officers believe that since they have been doing the job for

so long, they should be exempt from such testing. The older officers believe they can do the job just fine being out of shape. Any tests will need to be age specific for the officer. The mandatory physical fitness tests will be easier for women to complete since they are not as strong as men are.

These four counter claims all have viable supporting information. The basis of cost is financing a program. Implementing a program from the ground will require a substantial cost to the agency. Since most police departments do not have a private gym located in the station, they will have to outsource the training location to local gyms for officers to work out. Becoming a member of a local gym can cost anywhere from \$30.00 dollars to \$100.00 dollars a month. Hiring a personal trainer for the officers will be a substantial price. A local gym with trainer can be a surprising amount for a few private sessions per officer. The final cost for an agency will be for a company such as The Cooper Institute or The Huguley Physical Assessment Program in Texas to provide an accurate assessment for the individual officer.

The supporting information for police unions are that they are there to help officers but sometimes let politics get in the way of a good thing. Some unions believe that they cannot be required to be sprayed with OC to carry it or be tased with a Taser. The unions can be a deterrent of a good thing by allowing members to stay unfit. Officers can also start a union in their agency in order to deter such positive movements as a physical assessment of officers.

Information supporting the liability issues will be the use of the Texas Workers Compensation Laws. If officers are hurt in the line of duty, the agency will be held

responsible for any injuries or death. Giving the physical assessment tests will be considered an on-duty activity due to any assessments being given while on-duty.

The information supporting age/gender issues are that the tests can be biased due to the age and gender of the officer. Older officers are more likely to get hurt or worse if instituting a mandatory physical assessment test without proper training time to prepare. It may take several months for an older officer to safely and slowly prepare for any physical assessments. Female officers can be considered weaker due to their body structure and makeup. Female officers can be more susceptible to injuries than men. There are certain advantages and disadvantages between of each the genders due to their differences in the way men and women are built and body compositions.

Many people can refute any claims stated above as to why police departments do not have a mandatory physical assessment requirement as policy. The first refuted claim would be the cost imposed on an agency for keeping fit officers. It does not cost very much to work out at home by just buying a pair of running shoes and go to the local high school track. Municipalities or counties can go to the local gyms and ask for reduced membership costs for city or county employees (group rates). Civic organizations such as the Citizens Police Officers Association, Masons, and Lions Clubs can help offset the high cost by assisting with gym fees through donations.

The second claim to be refuted is police officer unions. If the department's policy is to have a mandatory physical assessment test, then give unions a positive reason for the test. It can be a prescreening for a serious medical condition due to heart attack, stroke, diabetes, etc. Also, the agency will be furnishing the physical assessment test at

no cost to the employee and give every form of assistance to achieve positive results (Mroz, 2008).

The third refutable fact given was the liability regarding physical fitness of police officers. Agencies through workers compensation will take care of most injuries sustained during the testing. Agencies can also give incentives or bonuses for participating in fitness standards. Insurance companies may give lower rates to the agencies who participate as well.

The last refutable fact is based on age/gender of the officer. The physical fitness tests that are provided by reputable companies are designed around the age and gender of the officer through careful studies. They give a sound assessment of the fitness levels of each officers based on the studies (Remsburg, 2006).

POSITION

The issue remains that fitness in law enforcement officers affects their general health, longevity of the job, and work related stress. Out of shape police officers are embarrassing not only to themselves but the community they serve. Being unhealthy in a high stress occupation can lead to several health related problems like heart attacks, strokes, and diabetes. The current danger is indicated in a study from 1983 to 1993, conducted by the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research, randomly sampled 1,700 officers from different law enforcement agencies across the country. The results showed that when compared with the general population, officers' average fitness levels were below normal in the areas of aerobic fitness, body fat, and abdominal strength and average in upper body strength and lower back flexibility. As a group, law enforcement officers have a greater morbidity and mortality rate than the general public due mostly to

cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, and suicide. The risk of heart attack doubles with each decade of law enforcement service (Quigley, 2008).

A fitness consultant and President of FitForcetm Jay Smith stated to an International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) forum that he favors career long department wide testing of every officer's physical condition, with no slack cut for such variables as gender. There should be one standard. Jay Smith further gave members of the IACP forum some vital statistics and claimed that up to 20% of today's law enforcement officers cannot perform physical tasks essential to the job. Up to 95% of the females randomly tested in validation studies cannot perform such tasks; in some places, basic police officer academies have lowered standards to graduate recruits. Police officers should identify the physical demands of the job in their agency, develop a standard related to those demands, and develop programs that will help in-service officers meet those standards. An agency has the responsibility to ensure the physical readiness of its police officers (Remsberg, 2006).

There are six major components of a physical fitness program. First is cardiovascular endurance. Cardiovascular endurance is the ability to take in and deliver oxygen to the working muscles to produce energy to sustain the activity. The test that is most viable to determine cardiovascular endurance is the 1.5 mile run. Anaerobic power is the second major component of a fitness program. Anaerobic power is defined as the ability to make short, intense bursts of maximal effort. A good determinate of anaerobic power is a 300 meter sprint or climbing a stair case. The third component is muscular strength. Muscular strength refers to the muscles' ability to generate maximal force such as a maximum lift on a bench press. Muscular endurance is the fourth component of a

physical fitness program. This component refers to the muscles ability to sustain sub-maximal force as in how long a police officer can lift, push, pull, or carry an item as designed in a weight lifting program. The fifth component is flexibility. Flexibility is defined as the ability to use the available range of motion at a given joint or structure. Stretching is a common practice that tests a police officers flexibility. It deals with bending over, running, or any common tasks. The last component is body composition or the ration of fat to lean muscle tissue. A body fat calculator can determine the amount of fat or Body Mass Index. Wellness may consequently be defined as those purposeful actions taken to attain and maintain optimal health and fitness (Smith & Tooker, 2005).

All agencies should mandate all officers, from police down to animal control, maintain a physical fitness standard. The rigors of the law enforcement profession requires physical strength to perform the defensive and offensive tactics necessary to control offenders. Also, officers must be physicaly able to save lives as well. Positive image should be maintained while in uniform or plainclothes. It all adds up to a command presence (Grossi, 2007).

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

Law enforcement agencies should provide a fitness criteria and an annual physical fitness test for law enforcement officers. The agency needs to seek the assistance of a reputable company such as The Huguley Physical or The Cooper Institute to provide a complete officer study including blood work. Officers need be able to perform such as prescribed by the institute giving the physical exam. If the officer fails the tests or does not achieve a fit for duty status, they will be placed on restricted duty, given 30 to 120 days to retest, and given time to train while on duty. A city is obligated

to provide one evaluation during this time, and any additional evaluations will be at the expense of the employee. Any employee failing to meet the rating of good by the end of the 120 days will be deemed unfit for duty and will be unable to meet the job description for their position within the police department. They will be reassigned within the department or another department within the city.

Agencies need to provide a mandatory annual fitness testing for law enforcement officers. The cost of the tests should be not a problem for most agencies. They can use contracts, donations, or supplement the training budget at the end of the year. While police unions are not prevalent in Texas, it can be presented to them in a positive manner for the safety of their members. A good department policy needs be adopted to provide any answers to the questions they might have. Liability of injuries will be the responsibility of the agency. Workers compensation rules state that the officers will be paid a certain percentage of wages earned if hurt, but due to a mandatory test, an agency will pay the officer's complete salary and the officer will be placed on restricted duty. Mandatory physical fitness tests can be an evaluation for an unknown preexisting health problem. Fitness tests needs be with regard to the officers' age and gender. Most reputable companies that administer the tests have a summary of where each officer should be with regard to age/gender. Any claims refuting why an agency must not have a mandatory physical fitness test is meritless. An officer's health is the most important thing an agency needs be concerned about. The officers deserve a quality life after retirement. Mandatory annual fitness testing is important due to the large amount of turnover in the law enforcement community and health related issues on the job that cause stress in all areas of the officers' life.

REFERENCES

- Grossi, D. (2007, August 1). Mandatory Fitness Standards for In-Service Officers [Electronic version]. *Police Marksman Magazine*, 32,4.
- Quigley, S. A. (2008, June). Fit for Duty? The Need for Physical Fitness Programs for Law Enforcement Officers [Electronic version]. *Police Chief*, 75,6.
- Mroz, R. (2008, September 19). Career Physical Fitness Standards. *Policeone.com*. Retrieved May 31, 2009, from http://www.policeone.com/pc_print.asp?vid=1735761
- Remsberg, C. (2006, November 20). Are “rediness” tests a better cure than “fitness”tests for LEOs’ poor conditioning? *Policeone.com*. Retrieved October 30, 2008, from <http://www.policeone.com/writers/columnists/Charles-Remsberg/articles/1192300-Are-readiness-tests-a-better-cure-than-fitness-tests-for-LEOs-poor-conditioning>
- Smith, J. & Tooker, G. (2005, February). Health and Fitness in law Enforcement: A voluntary Model Program Response To a Critical Issue. *CaleaUpdate*, 87. Retrieved June 1, 2009, from <http://www.calea.org/Online/newsletter/No87/healthfitness.htm>

APPENDIX

Sample 60 Minute Full Body Workout

Unless otherwise indicated, for all exercises use a weight that causes you to “fail” between 8-10 reps per set. Perform 5 minutes of light cardio and stretching prior to the routine. Also, you can perform one light-weight warm-up set (not reflected in the sets in the routine below), and three working sets for each exercises.

Workout #1 (Day One) Exercises

Barbell Chest Press: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Pull Ups (*Can be performed on a pull-up station with assist or a traditional pull-up bar*): Perform as many pull-ups as you can for 3 sets.

Standing Military (Barbell or Dumbbell) Shoulder Press: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Barbell Squat: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Seated Calf Raise: 15 Reps for 3 Sets

(Optional) Dumbbell Bicep Curls: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

(Optional) Tricep Bench Dips: Perform as many dips as you can for 3 sets.*

(Optional) Back Extensions: One Set of 15**

Swiss/Stability Ball Ab Crunches: 20-25***

Rest and Recover for at least 48 hours.

Workout #2 (Day Two) Exercises

Dips: Perform as many reps as possible for 3 sets*

Cable Rows: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Seated Dumbbell Shoulder Presses: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Barbell or Dumbbell Deadlifts: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Smith Machine Standing Calf Raises: 15 Reps for 3 Sets

(Optional) Dumbbell Hammer Curls: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

(Optional) Overhead Seated Dumbbell Tricep Press: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

(Optional) Back Extensions: One Set of 15**

Hanging Leg Raises/Roman Chair (Abs): Perform as many as you can for 3 sets***

Rest and Recover for at least 48 hours.

Workout #3 (Day Three) Exercises

Dumbbell Chest Press (*Vary the position of the bench from flat to incline across sets*): 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Bent Over Dumbbell Rows (*can be performed in a Smith Machine as well*): 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Upright Rows (Dumbbell or Barbell): 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Lying Leg Press: 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets

Seated Calf Press (Performed on Leg Press Machine): 15 Reps for 3 Sets
(Optional) Reverse Bicep Curls (Palms down): 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets
(Optional) Lying Tricep Dumbbell Extensions ("Skull crushers"): 8-10 Reps for 3 Sets
(Optional) Back Extensions: One set of 15 **
V-Crunches/Jack-Knife Sit Up (Abs): Perform as many as you can for 3 sets.***

* As it becomes easier to perform dips with your body weight, add additional resistance by holding a light dumbbell between your feet (in the case of parallel bar dips), or have someone place a light plate across your legs on bench dips.

** Increase resistance on back extensions by holding a light plate or dumbbell over your chest during the movement.

*** Increase resistance progressively during ab crunches by holding a plate or dumbbell across your chest. For hanging leg raises/Roman Chair leg raises or V Crunches, place a light dumbbell between your feet.