

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

COMPREHENSIVE WELLNESS/FITNESS PROGRAM FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC SAFETY AT DALLAS/FORT WORTH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

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## **ABSTRACT**

A person physically unable to perform the job responsibilities of a Public Safety Officer could pose a direct threat to human life and safety. Physical fitness has a direct impact on job readiness. The renewed interest in fitness nationwide has been accompanied by many research studies exploring the components and effect of successful fitness programs. The officers of the Dallas-Ft. Worth International Airport Department of Public Safety have the unique responsibility of maintaining State Certifications in three disciplines; Police, Fire and Emergency Medical training. This requirement makes physical fitness crucial for them to perform their specific job tasks successfully year after year.

This research paper will explore the need for implementing a physical fitness/wellness program for the Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport Department of Public Safety. The research will be conducted using relevant articles, books, related case law, and other police and fire department practices. This research will support the theory that a physically fit officer will not only perform at a higher level, but will deal more effectively with other wellness concerns such as, stress management, weight loss and injury protection.

There are four specific areas to research before presenting an effective presentation program to the management leaders of the Dallas-Ft. Worth International Airport; cost, liabilities, employee medical evaluations and necessity. This research will identify and support a program that will maintain appropriate physical fitness needed to perform specific public safety job tasks as safely and efficiently as possible.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to present an argument for implementing a physical fitness/wellness program for the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Public Safety Officers. Physical fitness has been shown to directly relate to an officer's job readiness. One survey reported 43% of the people that exercised were able to work better and be more creative, while over 60% indicated being fit made them feel more relaxed and energetic (Pritchard).

Physical fitness is but one factor of "total fitness." Authorities agree that a combination of several fitness factors are most effective in reaching long term benefits. Certain combined components are designed to condition employees mentally and physically from the beginning of their employment throughout their careers regardless of their age, sex, rank, or job assignment. As the department work force ages, the inability of public safety officers to maintain adequate physical fitness becomes a liability concern.

Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Public Safety Recruit Officers must successfully pass a standardized physical agility examination measuring the applicant's physical condition prior to being offered employment. Without the opportunity to maintain physical fitness and wellness habits, the average public safety officers' physical condition will deteriorate and the once high level of fitness will have disappeared. Maintaining physical fitness can help retard the degenerative diseases associated with aging, and potentially influence the length and quality of life (Texas Dept. of Health). This research will demonstrate how awareness, education, intervention, and health fitness programs can effect behavioral change, modify and control risk factors and thereby significantly prevent disease (Pritchard). The public safety

profession must recognize the successes of business and industry wellness programs, because they pay one-half of the nations health care costs (Pritchard foreword). Industry has become increasingly interested in primary prevention of employee illness and disease. This research will point out that the overall cost of an effective fitness and wellness program can be very low, considering the program should be looked upon as a benefit to recruit and retain bright healthy people. This concept should be justification in itself.

Poor health and fitness is beginning to show its effects and the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Public Safety Officers through on-the-job injuries, increased sick leave usage and ineffective stress management. Poor employee health not only endangers the officer's well-being, it also increases the department's insurance premiums. This translates into higher department operating costs. The failure of any public safety officer to satisfactorily complete any job task due to poor fitness leaves the department open for legal remedies from the community it serves. This research paper is designed to assist the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Board to recognize that it would be far less costly to prevent illness than to cure it, and that optimal health can be approached through fitness. which directly correlates with improved personal lifestyles (Klarreich).

### **Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context**

The Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Department of Public Safety requires each applicant to successfully complete a standardized physical ability evaluation as part of their application process. Fitness training is continued through the Police and Fire Academy training curriculum; however, this is where the departments emphasis on physical fitness requirements for its officers

ends. This is the major reason I feel immediate evaluation of a wellness/fitness program for our department would be a smart management decision. Growing evidence demonstrates that regular physical activity along with a healthy diet are associated with reduced risk for cardiovascular diseases.

The Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Department of Public Safety is almost twenty five years old and is showing immediate signs of an aging work force. As the officer ages, health factors begin to surface, resulting in on-the-job injuries and increasing amounts of personal sick leave. Physical fitness is important for achieving and maintaining good health for people of all ages (Texas Department of Health). The physical demands on Public Safety Officers increases every year, whether through intensive classroom in-service training, physical exertion requirements practicing fire suppression or physical encounters with resistant suspects. Poor nutrition, stress, smoking, alcohol consumption are but a few external factors eroding an officer's health and ultimate ability to perform his job satisfactorily. Good nutrition is one of the most important keys to good health and fitness, "you are what you eat!" (U.S. Coast Guard). Educating department managers to better understand and support a wellness/fitness program would assist officers (who lack initiative) seek fitness alternatives and/or effective nutritional education. I believe wellness programs send out a strong message to employees that management cares about its people.

There are rising legal concerns from police departments, affected officer's family members and certain Federal Labor agencies regarding methods of program implementation and administration of varied physical agility training programs throughout the United States. Assessment training is defined as a test for "general fitness conditions", including five categories

of fitness: cardiovascular function, body composition, flexibility, dynamic and absolute strength. "The physical assessment test is a professionally accepted means of measuring general physical conditioning. General physical conditioning is a better overall indicator of an individual's ability to function in ... situations such as that of a recruit" (USA v Wichita Falls). The physical agility test is defined as tests of "specific motor skills directly related to the accomplishment of police functions" (USA v Wichita Falls). The physical ability necessary to pass a physical agility test should be acquired prior to attending a training academy.

Liability for departments who fail to train (require) their officers to be physically fit was addressed in Parker v District of Columbia (1987). This officer shooting case proved "deliberate indifference was exhibited by a pattern of inadequate training, supervision and subsequent discipline of officers" (Parker v District of Columbia). This case also showed the officer involved in the shooting had a lack of training and inadequate physical condition which "posed a foreseeable risk of harm to others" (Parker v District of Columbia). This case set a dangerous precedent of future liability cases involving any physically unfit officer. Public safety departments will have to expand their ideas towards wellness/fitness programs if they plan on meeting the needs of a more fitness-conscious recruit, as well as that of an aging work force.

## **Review of Literature and Practice**

Wellness/fitness programs have proven successful even without a "fitness center." A department can implement the following practical educational ideas and derive significant employee benefit:

1. general education meeting rooms
2. nutritional information
3. smoking cessation classes
4. physical exams
5. seminars with relative wellness tip information

Recent studies show that 50-80 % of deaths are by lifestyle generated maladies which include; heart disease, cancer and strokes (Klarreich). Health literature points out that physical activity has a leveling effect on the appetite and also increases a person's bone density. In order to achieve an appropriate level of total fitness that is safe. and effective, you don't need to be an athlete or a fitness buff. You simply have to exercise regularly and three times a week is the standard recommended program (U.S. Coast Guard). Physical fitness will not prevent all forms of illness or injury; however, it will certainly provide advantages to the following areas:

1. help maintain body weight
2. improves muscle tone, strength and endurance
3. improves flexibility
4. improves the cardiovascular system
5. improves posture and physical appearance
6. slows down the aging process
7. motivates toward positive lifestyle changes in nutrition, smoking and alcohol and drug abuse
8. speeds recovery time following illness, injury or disease

A striking statistic relating to fitness shows sedentary employees have 30 % more hospital



days than those who get adequate exercise, and seriously overweight employees are 48 % more likely to have insurance claims exceeding \$5,000.00 during one year at work compared to normal weight employees (Pritchard).

Enlightened managers recognize that people who are healthy and physically fit tend to be more productive, happier on and off the job, miss less work time and deal more effectively with stress. Furthermore, physically and mentally fit employees help reduce company medical insurance payments (Jensen). Developing a department fitness/wellness program does not involve a new radical model of organizational behavior, it provides an environment which reflects concern for people's health and well-being. It makes good business sense to pay attention to important personal and social concerns that affect today's employee (Guild).

Health fitness/wellness programs produce numerous advantages both for the employee and the employer. Our department has used the Cooper Program at the Dallas Institute of Aerobic Research to measure fitness levels of our officers, and to develop a program evaluation system, but we failed to follow through and have the institute design individual exercise and nutritional plans. The cost of a fitness/wellness program would be low considering that it should be looked upon as a benefit to recruit and retain bright people, and this is justification enough (Cantu).

I telephoned the New Castle County Police Department in Dover, Delaware and The University of Delaware Public Safety Department concerning their wellness programs. Their operations are similar to ours at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. I also personally visited with the Houston and Jersey Village Police Departments in Texas, because they currently utilize department wellness programs. After review, I feel the Houston and Jersey Village Police

Department programs are more developed and parallel our department needs. They have developed appropriate operating procedures for these programs and seem to have average success with its administration and fitness results. The reluctance to embrace standardized physical wellness programs by police departments is very frustrating, but this idea of wellness seems to be gaining recognition every year. As the success stories grow, more police administrators will hopefully recognize proper physical conditioning will make their officer's bodies work better, longer and stronger.

### **Discussion of Relevant Issues**

A physically fit officer will be injured, sick or disabled less often, which makes them more trainable. Fitness helps control stress and will promote emotional stability. Stress is the growing health concern in the work place because it controls the function of so many organs in the human body. To be free of stress is to be dead, but effectively managing stress will help employees be healthy and happy (Campbell). For every dollar a department spends on a wellness/fitness program they will soon get that and more back as a result of reduced medical premiums, higher employee productivity and higher morale.

Developing an effective wellness program requires a positive plan of action to promote health in the work place. Our department should be prepared to address the following areas:

1. adequate financial resources
2. supportive management
3. a capable wellness/fitness staff (leaders)
4. a phased in educational approach

5. incorporate and maintain an element of fun
6. maximum visibility and publicity through the department
7. monetary incentives to over-achieving employees (over standard)

A wellness/fitness program should be enjoyable and must become a regular habit for the employee. Emphasizing fun and enjoyment in a fitness program increases the likelihood of a successful program. We must combine exercise with education. Elaborate workout facilities are not necessary for a successful program so long as they are comfortable and provide a safe environment. I feel the most productive and creative part of my day comes right after my lunch time exercise routine. The ability to routinely remove the employee from the stress of the work place helps them make clearer, more rational decisions. With employers being held increasingly responsible for the health and fitness of their employees, it makes good business sense to be proactive by developing a department wellness program.

I found several departments who have developed wellness/fitness programs over the years, but have discontinued them due to rigid budget constraints, lack of departmental interest and poor employee participation. The primary cause of this is inadequate preparation and administration. Their main rejection criteria was always the monetary constraints. Upon recognizing the expense of having each officer submit to a complete physical examination, they began searching for an alternative way of assessing health risks at a more reasonable cost.

For example, our department visited several years ago with the Tom Landry Sports Medicine and Research Center at Dallas Baylor Hospital, and found their wellness questionnaire and physical examination quoted at \$680.00 per officer with a subsequent department contract

cost of \$200.00 per month or \$2400.00. we also visited with the Center for Lifestyle Enhancement, RCA Medical Center of Plano. Their Riskscan Program was similar to Landry's, however, their cost per officer was less at \$250.00, but required a counseling rate of \$55.00 per hour, and a \$1,250.00 (one time) management fee. These costs proved to be restrictive for our 300 plus officer department.

Methods to implement a wellness program, legal considerations from the American Disabilities Act, the aging work forces (grandfather clause), and discipline issues for non compliance seem to be the four major constraints police administrators need to address and conquer. These particular areas should be addressed in detail within each department's organizational hierarchy. I will suggest later how these issues could be addressed through a department organized research committee's recommendations.

The best way to attack counter-productive attitudes toward fitness programs is to provide hard data to show that work site wellness works (Jensen). I feel certain incentive programs will be necessary to generate personal fitness goals which might be unchallenged in a routine fitness program. An example of this might be to provide \$50, \$75 and \$100.00 incentive packages for officers who exceed the national mean scores by 70, 80 and 90% respectively. . These funds could be budgeted items each year, and issued to employees who maintain these high standards through quarterly fitness examinations. Indeed, it is far less costly to prevent illness than to cure it (Klarreich). An effective wellness program will help develop optimal employee health through improved personal lifestyles.

## **Conclusion/Recommendations**

There are several major areas of concern for our department in implementing a wellness/fitness program that need personal department review outside of this research paper. I recommend further evaluation of a wellness program be intimately discussed with our Human Resource, Risk Management and Legal staffs respectively, to share concerns and ideas by airport management. The benefits to organizations involved in encouraging their employees to participate in wellness programs appear to have substantial merit. Since coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death for people over the age of 35, a wellness program to identify heart disease candidates within our ranks seems rather prudent. High blood pressure is at epidemic proportions among the U.S. population - an estimated 35 million people have this malady (Guild).

Doctors profess the best treatment today for high blood pressure is lifestyle habit change, ie: weight reduction, stress management, regular aerobic exercise, smoking cessation and salt reduction (U. S. Coast Guard). All of these factors can be addressed in a wellness/fitness program. Arguments for and against mandatory physical fitness requirements initially center around the program implementation costs. When you consider liability protection and the medical and health care cost savings associated with a healthy employee, these start-up costs appear very cost effective in providing better public safety to our airport community.

I would like to recommend the following suggestions towards empowering our department employees with developing organization guidelines for a workable wellness/fitness program within DPS:

1. form a committee of five interested officers and staff to review training and nutritional education alternatives available to our department and develop

- guidelines concerning proficiency of fitness tests and incentives
2. survey input from the rank and file about the type of training necessary to function as a Public Safety Officer, and whether fitness tests should be conducted quarterly or semi-annually
  3. review contracts with physical education professionals to help design our training programs
  4. review contract facilities to provide medical screening to all DPS officers prior to participating in fitness programs, and periodically thereafter
  5. establish officer fitness instructor needs and qualifications
  6. educate and train two or more officers who have a strong desire to administer the program
  7. begin the program with voluntary participation for the first two years. This will help prevent program overload and dissatisfaction by employees
  8. mandate all sworn personnel that their participation after the two year voluntary participation becomes mandatory
  9. require a committee to research and address the four major constraints facing police departments today, ie: legal considerations for the American Disabilities Act, the aging work forces (grandfather clause), discipline issues for employee non-compliance and implementation methods

If our department will properly research and analyze the above listed recommended topics, I feel our department can successfully implement a wellness/fitness program by the year 2000. A good health and fitness program for the Airport Department of Public Safety will add

to morale, reduce health care costs, and tenured employees can continue providing improved public safety for the airport community. This type of program initiative is a large capital investment for any Public Safety department. The cost of doing nothing may be more than any department can afford.

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