

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

Physical Fitness in Law Enforcement

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

**By
Adam Rodriguez**

**Texas State University-San Marcos
San Marcos, Texas
March 2009**

ABSTRACT

Physical fitness in law enforcement is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because peace officers are faced with many dangers and stressors each day. A police officer must be physically fit to meet the mental and physical challenges presented to him/her everyday. A police officer's life and mental readiness is dependent on his physical well being.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not peace officers should be required to meet certain physical fitness requirements to perform the duties of a peace officer. A police officer should be required to maintain a minimum level of physical fitness. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 100 survey participants.

The researcher discovered that many law enforcement agencies and the peace officers that work within the agency realize the importance of having physically fit officers. The agencies try to get officers to understand the importance of being in good physical condition. They provide a weight room or access to a fitness center but fall short of requiring their officers to maintain a minimum fitness level. The researcher has discovered a variety of reasons why the agency does not make a fitness/wellness program mandatory. Some officers feel that they do not need to meet a minimum fitness standard to do the job of a peace officer and resist efforts by their agencies to get them in shape. Many police agencies want the officers to lead a healthy lifestyle and maintain a minimum level of fitness but they do not mandate it because of possible lawsuits.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	3
Methodology	8
Findings	10
Discussions/Conclusions	13
References	16
Appendix	

INTRODUCTION

The issue to be examined considers whether or not a physical fitness/wellness program should be implemented in law enforcement agencies. Police agencies around the country have either a voluntary fitness/wellness program, mandatory physical fitness programs, or do not have a program in place at all. The start of a physical fitness program in any law enforcement agency is not going to be without its setbacks. Resistance from officers and administrators is inevitable. Many incumbents look unfavorably at the implementation of such a program. Incumbents in an organization that does not have a physical fitness program in place have become accustomed to it or might workout on their off duty hours. Newer officers may be more accepting of such a program, and chances are, they were exposed to physical training while in the academy. The administration is hesitant to begin a fitness/wellness program for a variety of reasons, but the biggest reason seems to be the threat of lawsuits from incumbents and officer candidates. Another reason for not beginning a program may be because of the cost involved with setting up and maintaining such a program. In an article on CALEA Update (Smith & Tooker, 2005), there are benefits for the police officer who leads a healthy lifestyle and is involved in a wellness program. Some benefits include improved capability to perform specific physical tasks, improved ability to mobilize the body efficiently, improved tolerance to fatigue, reduced risk during physical tasks, better psychological preparation, and reduced stress and associated health risks.

The relevance of physically fit officers to law enforcement is that a fit officer will be able to handle the stressors of police work more efficiently. The same officer will

also be able to handle his off duty hours in a more positive way as well. If an officer chooses not to stay in shape and live an unhealthy lifestyle, then the negative effects of high stress and unhealthy food choices will take its toll on officers, both on and off the job. A law enforcement officer who stays fit for duty has improved morale, a positive attitude, improves his/her recovery time if injured, takes less sick days, and has a better quality family life. These are just a few of the reasons to get officers into better shape. The officer has much to gain from getting into better physical condition.

The purpose of this research is to examine if starting a physical fitness program is beneficial to the department where an officer is employed. The research will look at why officers do not maintain a satisfactory level of fitness and why police administrations choose to forego ever starting one. The research will also examine the two types of fitness programs, mandatory and voluntary. The researcher will try to determine which program seems to work best for officers.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not law enforcement agencies should implement some type of fitness/wellness program within their agencies. The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 100 participants who consisted of both civilians and police personnel. The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research is to find out how many agencies are implementing physical fitness programs and, if so, what type is practiced.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because officers and police administrators will be able to make an informed decision as to whether they should start some type of fitness program,

whether it is voluntary or mandatory, or whether the department should continue to allow officers to decide on their own to start implementing healthy lifestyle changes. It is hoped that the research will show that wellness programs in law enforcement agencies are beneficial. The researcher hopes to show that the implementation of a fitness/wellness program will improve the officer's productivity, morale, job performance, create a positive attitude and improve the law enforcement professional's health both on and off duty.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When a male or female enters into the training academy for a police agency, they are taught everything they need to know to do the job effectively. History of Policing, U.S. Constitution, Professionalism and Ethics, Patrol Tactics, Search and Seizure, Firearms Training, Mechanics of Arrest, and State Laws and Procedures are just a tiny fraction of the courses that are taught at a basic peace officer academy. While in the academy, trainees are taught hundreds of hours of subject matter relating to the police field. Most police academies usually incorporate physical fitness training into the curriculum. In fact, when cadets graduate from the academy, they are probably in the best shape of their lives.

Every peace officer quickly realizes that the learning does not stop when they graduate from the academy and report for duty. The truth is that the officer has only scratched the surface when it comes to knowing everything there is to know about police work. A good police officer never stops learning. Experience is always valuable, but unless an officer keeps up with the constantly changing laws, city ordinances, and court rulings in both the state the officer works in and the United States, he or she will

not be a competent and effective peace officer. The officers should keep themselves educated and informed. A police officer knows that they must keep their minds sharp, and it stands to reason that police officers should do the same for their body. For a good portion of peace officers, the only physical fitness training they were subjected to was in the academy. After graduation, many peace officers never give physical fitness a second thought, and the body's downward spiral begins.

The very nature of police work can be stressful on the body. A police officer must respond to high risk calls for service, work mandatory shift work, are exposed to violence and death, and then the officer adds poor eating and sleeping habits into the mix. All this, combined with the demands from the department, can really add a tremendous amount of stress on the officer's body. As if this is not enough, the officer must also deal with the stressors at home. A spouse, children, finances, and all the other pressures of family life must be handled. All of the stress created from work and family slowly takes its toll on the officer mentally and physically. Some of the problems related to unmanaged stress are high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, ulcers, migraine headaches, anxiety, and depression, among other things. Peace officers also have a high percentage of alcoholism and suicide among its ranks (Violanti, 2007). As said before, poor eating habits because of unscheduled or interrupted meals is leading to other big issues, obesity and diabetes. Smoking is another major cause of death among officers. According to Violanti (2007), the average age of death for police officers in a 40-year study is 66 years of age. The fact of the matter is that law enforcement officers are leading a very unhealthy lifestyle. A lack of exercise and poor eating habits are the chief cause of health problems facing many officers today. The problem facing

the law enforcement profession is a mirror image of what is wrong with the nation as a whole. With this being said, law enforcement officers must get on track and begin to practice healthy lifestyle changes.

The law enforcement agency must first start with finding out why peace officers do not incorporate a physical fitness or wellness program into their lifestyle. Peace officers are no different than the civilian workforce when it comes to reasons for not improving their exercise and eating habits. Work, family, and personal lives take up much of the officer's time. It is no secret that officers simply feel like they do not have the time or energy to incorporate physical fitness into an already demanding job and schedule. The officers themselves must change their mindset and realize that being fit needs to become part of their job. The very nature of their work requires them to be fit.

Officers must be ready to go from a relaxed state to a high stress or emergency function at a moments notice. The officer's own body needs to be recognized as a tool of the trade. They will need to depend on it to get them through a critical situation or maybe even save their life. It is just a matter of time when the officer will have to deal with a physically challenging situation or a mentally stressful ordeal. In an article by Hammerstrom (2006), on the subject of lacking fitness standards, Steve Farrell, Director of Professional Education at the Cooper Institute in Dallas, TX is quoted as saying, "It makes no sense to us that fitness would be required in academy but not in the real world." (p. 1). The Cooper Institute is a non-profit organization that conducts research and education in the field of physical fitness and has worked with law enforcement in the field of physical fitness since 1976. The Cooper Institute believes that fitness should be maintained throughout the individual's career if their job requires a readiness to

respond physically. An officer owes it to himself and his career to keep fit.

Departments also have a duty to keep officers fit.

At the present time, there is no set standard for law enforcement officers to maintain a certain level of fitness. It is left up to the officer or department. Some departments have mandatory fitness testing and will impose sanctions if the minimum requirements are not met. Others have voluntary programs for the officer, and the officer may choose not to participate if desired. Most agencies realize the need for physical fitness programs but find it difficult to implement one. A big reason why departments do not implement mandatory fitness standards is because of cost and fear of lawsuits from incumbents for injuries or discrimination. A department that chooses not to offer or develop fitness and wellness training for its officers can incur much more costs if ruled liable in court. In the case of *Parker vs. District of Columbia* (850 F. 2d 708, 1988), "Officer Hayes simply was not in adequate physical shape. This condition posed a foreseeable risk of harms to others....concluded that Officer Hayes' conduct was the result of deliberate indifference on the part of the District with respect to the physical training of its police officers." (p. 5). The district court ruled in favor of the plaintiff for the District's failure to adequately train its officers. Almost twenty years after this ruling, many law enforcement agencies still do not require physical fitness standards for their officers.

Validation studies performed for over 180 federal, state, and municipal departments by affiliates of The Cooper Institute defined specific job-related fitness standards for each agency (The Cooper Institute, 2007.) The recommended test battery for law enforcement are as follows: one and a half mile run, three hundred meter

run, 1 repetition maximum bench press raw score, 1 repetition maximum bench press ratio, push-up, sit-up, and vertical jump. The agency decides what the defensible standard will be. With no governing body to regulate physical fitness standards for law enforcement officers, the minimum standards are left up to the individual agencies. For an agency that does decide to implement minimum fitness standards, the concern is how defensible the minimum standard in court is in the event a department faces a lawsuit either by an incumbent or an applicant. Most of the research shows that the most defensible way is to have a validation study conducted for a particular department to show that the fitness tests are job related. In an article in PoliceOne.com (Remsburg, 2007), Jim Smith of FitForcetm said it is important that testing programs be validated; that is, that standards established and tested “relate to actual job demands” (p. 2).

The term physical fitness, for a lot of officers, can bring on very negative images. It is important for the agency to understand that the key is to get the officer in good enough shape to accomplish the physical demands of the job and to emphasize a healthy lifestyle change. A good portion of an officer’s job is spent being sedentary either on patrol or in an administrative position, but at any given moment, an officer may be called upon to do a physically demanding task. This could range from walking up a large number of stairs to an officer fighting for his life with a suspect. An officer does not need to be a tri-athlete to perform the job, so a fitness program should be realistic and attainable.

The program should focus on improving cardiovascular strength, muscular strength, flexibility, and proper nutrition. To put an officer on a rigorous fitness regimen is not only foolish, but it is also dangerous. The peace officer will either be injured or

drop out because of frustration. Too much, too soon is setting up the average officer for failure. The agency needs to either hire or train a certified fitness specialist to oversee the program and administer fitness programs or tests. This will ensure that safe and effective exercise programs are conducted. It will also ensure good management and documentation for the program and its participating officers.

Whether or not an agency uses a mandatory or voluntary fitness program is up for debate. A mandatory program will ensure compliance and participation. This type of program will likely get the most resistance from officers. This type of program would have to be phased in over a two to three year period. Voluntary programs give the officer the choice of participating if he/she so chooses. This will not get all the officers in shape either. There will be those who choose not to participate, and, unless they are working out on their own, they will remain out of shape and continue with their unhealthy lifestyle. Whatever program chosen, it is important to remember that physical fitness programs have changed and the “all or nothing,” “no pain, no gain” practice is no longer accepted or safe. Officers should be educated in the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle and being physically fit. Physical fitness should be fun and challenging. Because of the differing fitness levels of the officers involved, the training methods and programs should be tailored to the individual officer. The fitness/wellness program should emphasize a lifestyle change. After all, the officer will be working in the law enforcement agency for many years, and the fitness program must be tailored in a way that will allow the officer to incorporate the program into his daily routine.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not a mandatory or voluntary physical fitness/wellness program should be implemented at all law enforcement agencies. The researcher believes that agencies will recognize this need because it is beneficial to the officer's health in a stressful occupation. The agency that employs the officer will have officers that are more productive, have better attitudes, will use less sick days, and will enjoy a healthier lifestyle both on duty and at home. The program will benefit the entire organization as a whole.

The researcher hypothesizes that law enforcement agencies will recognize the need to implement such programs into their yearly training curriculum. The researcher believes that with the new information and research findings available to law enforcement administrators by fitness and health professionals, it will help administrators to see the need for fitness programs within their agency. With the help of fitness professionals, health and nutrition professionals, and the proper use of validated fitness tests administered by certified fitness trainers, the agencies will have a program in place that will be effective.

The method of inquiry will include: a review of literature from books, magazines, and articles. The researcher will also research the websites of health and fitness professionals. The instrument that will be used to measure the research findings regarding the subject of mandatory or voluntary fitness/wellness programs will include a survey of different law enforcement agencies and civilian personnel. The size of the survey will consist of 7 questions, distributed to 100 survey participants from different agencies in the Texas area. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in 82

out of the 100 surveys being returned. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by this researcher.

FINDINGS

Table I. Percentage of agencies with or without a fitness/wellness program in place.

Response	Participant	Total	Percentage
Yes	47	82	58%
No	35	82	42%

When asked if their agency currently has a fitness/wellness program in place, 58% of the people surveyed said that they had a fitness/wellness program in place. Forty-two percent of the people surveyed said that they did not have a program in place.

Table II. Percentage of agencies whose programs are voluntary or mandatory.

Response	Participant	Total	Percentage
Mandatory	8	53	15%
Voluntary	45	53	85%

When asked if their agency made their fitness/wellness program mandatory or voluntary, 15% of people surveyed said that the fitness/wellness program that is in place is mandatory. Eighty-five percent of the participants said that it was voluntary. Twenty nine people did not respond.

Table III. Percentage of participants who believe a fitness/wellness program should be required.

Response	Participant	Total	Percentage
Yes	59	78	76%
No	19	78	24%

When asked if a fitness/wellness program should be required by an agency, 76% of the people said that a fitness/wellness program should be required for all agencies.

Twenty-four percent said that a fitness program should not be required. Four had no response.

Table IV. Percentage of participants who have access to a weight room or fitness center.

Response	Participant	Total	Percentage
Yes	59	82	72%
No	23	82	28%

When asked if they had access to a weight room or fitness area, 72% of the participants said that they do have a weight room or fitness center at their agency.

Twenty-eight percent said they did not.

Table V. Percentage of agencies that offer incentives for maintaining a certain level of fitness.

Response	Participant	Total	Percentage
Yes	22	82	27%
No	60	82	73%

When asked if the participants received incentives for maintaining a certain level of fitness, 27% of the people said that their agency provides incentives for maintaining a certain level of fitness. Seventy-three percent said that they did not have incentives.

Table VI. Percentage of officers who would be receptive to a fitness/wellness program.

Response	Participant	Total	Percentage
Yes	50	63	80%
No	13	63	20%

When asked if officers would be receptive to a fitness/wellness program, 80% of the people surveyed said that they believed that the officers would be receptive to

having a fitness/wellness program in place. Twenty percent of the people said that the officers would not be receptive to one. Nineteen had no response.

Table VII. Percentage of agencies that have different standards for age and gender.

Response	Participant	Total	Percentage
Yes	17	76	23%
No	59	76	77%

When asked if the agency has different standards for age and gender, 23% of the people said that for the fitness/wellness program they do have in place, the agency does have different standards for age and gender. Seventy-seven percent do not have different standards. Six had no response.

Of all the data collected, police agencies are pretty close to being even when asked if a wellness program was in place at their agency. As indicated in Table I, 58% of agencies did have one in place, and 42% did not. In Table II, it shows that for agencies who did have a wellness program in place, an overwhelming number made the program voluntary, with 85% of the agencies indicating that the fitness/wellness program was voluntary and 15% making it mandatory. In Table III, 76% of those who participated in the survey indicated that they feel that a fitness program should be required for a police officer. In Table IV, a great majority of police agencies provided some type of weight room or fitness area for officers. Seventy-two percent of agencies had one, and 28% said they did not have a fitness area. When it came to incentives for officers participating in a fitness/wellness program, 73% said that they did not provide incentives for the officers. Only 27% said that they received some type of incentive for working out as indicated in Table V. In Table VI, 80% of those who participated in the survey said that the officers would be receptive to having a fitness/wellness program in

place compared to only 20%, who said they would not be receptive to one. In Table VII, when the question of age and gender was raised, 23% said that they do have different standards for male and female officers, while 77% said that they do not have different standards.

In addition to these survey results, the most frequent comments made indicating why officers do not participate in a fitness/wellness program or were resistant to one was because some officers felt that if they have been able to do the job all this time without a fitness standard, then they should not have to meet a standard now. Officers wanted incentives such as extra pay. Some departments indicated that the interest was just not there or that it was difficult to get the officers involved. Age and gender was also an issue. An older officer feels that he cannot match up to a younger physically fit officer, and female officers feel that they cannot meet the standards of male officers. Officers wanted to be able to workout while on duty. These comments are important to note because if a department can find ways to satisfy these needs, it would go a long way in helping to develop a fitness/wellness program and getting officers involved.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not a physical fitness program should be implemented in a police agency for its peace officers. The research also looks at whether a fitness/wellness program should be voluntary or mandatory. It also looks at some of the issues or problems that keep police agencies from beginning a program.

The purpose of this research was to determine if implementing a physical fitness/wellness program would be beneficial for the officers. The research question

that was examined focused on the health benefits of acquiring and maintaining a healthy lifestyle not only for the officer's health but also for the benefit of the department where the officer is employed. The researcher hypothesized that the benefits of having an officer in good physical condition far outweigh the negatives of having an officer who is out of shape and in poor health.

The researcher concluded from the findings that almost half of the law enforcement agencies surveyed did not have a fitness/wellness program in place, and of those agencies that do have one in place, a low percentage of departments make it mandatory. A high percentage of survey participants felt that fitness/wellness programs should be mandatory and that even though there may not be a large number of agencies with fitness/wellness programs in place, 72% of those surveyed said that they have access to a fitness center or weight room. A large number of agencies surveyed (73%) do not provide incentives for maintaining a certain level of fitness. Many of the participants in this survey felt that the officers would be receptive to a fitness/wellness program.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reasons why the findings did support the hypothesis are because more than half of police agencies have some type of fitness/wellness program in place. A vast majority of departments have chosen to make it voluntary. The majority of those surveyed said that they felt a physical fitness program should be required of officers. Some departments do provide access to a fitness center and weight room. Eighty percent of those polled felt that the officers would be receptive to a fitness/wellness program.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted from participants failing to answer all of the questions. The study of physical fitness in law enforcement is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because peace officers today face greater challenges in police work. Police work requires an officer to be mentally and physically ready for anything that may arise on any given day. Whether the day is spent chasing report calls the entire shift or fighting for his/her life during a routine call, the law enforcement officer needs to be ready at all times. Police agencies and the community they serve stands to benefit from the results of this research because it is important to realize that police officers today must be physically fit for duty.

REFERENCES

Violanti, J. (2007). *Dying on the job: The mortality risk for police officers.*

Retrieved July 19, 2007, from

http://www.cophealth.com/articles/articles_dying_a.html

Hammerstrom, C. (2006, August). *Lacking fitness standards, conditioning is a concern for officers as they age.* Retrieved July 20,

2007, from <http://www.themonitor.com>

Parker vs. District of Columbia United States Court of Appeals for the District of

Columbia Circuit 850 F.2nd 708; (1988). Retrieved July 2, 2007, from

<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>

The Cooper Institute, Dallas Texas. (2007). *Common questions regarding physical*

fitness tests, standards and programs for public safety. Retrieved July 21, 2007

from

http://www.cooperinst.org/education/law_enforcement/documents/fitness_questions.pdf

Remsberg, C. (2007). *Are "readiness" tests a better cure than "fitness" tests for LEOs' poor conditioning?* Retrieved July 21, 2007, from

<http://www.policeone.com/pc>

Smith, J. Tooker, G. (2005). *Health and Fitness in Law Enforcement: A voluntary model program response to a critical issue.* Retrieved August 27, 2008, from

<http://www.calea.org/Online/newsletter/No87/87index.htm>

APPENDIX

**This Is A Survey Requested In Partial Fulfillment For Graduation From the
Leadership Command College
Please Return to Sergeant Adam Rodriguez
Texas State University-San Marcos**

1. Does your agency currently have a fitness/wellness program in place?

Yes

No

2. If so is the program mandatory or voluntary?

3. Do you think a fitness program for officers should be required for all agencies?

Yes

No

4. Does your agency have a fitness center or weight room?

5. Does your agency provide incentives for maintaining a certain level of fitness?

6. If you do not have a fitness/wellness program in place, do you think the officers would be receptive to one?

7. Does your agency have different standards for age and gender?

Yes

No

AdditionalComments _____

_____.

