

**WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT OF PHYSICAL  
FITNESS STANDARDS FOR A LAW ENFORCEMENT  
AGENCY WITH LESS THAN FORTY SWORN  
OFFICERS BY 2010?**

**JOURNAL ARTICLE**

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**This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.**

**Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.**

**Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.**

**The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).**

## CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Despite the image of most police officers as healthy, physically fit, and stable crime fighters, the truth is that most police officers are not in very good shape.<sup>1</sup> Fairly recent studies have shown that police officers rank below the average population in aerobic fitness and body fat composition and they are only average or slightly above average in strength and flexibility.<sup>2</sup> Other studies have found that police officers as an occupational group are significantly less healthy than most other occupational groups in terms of their blood pressure, cholesterol level, maximal oxygen uptake, and cardiac risk.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most disturbing is the trend that the general wellness of police officers tends to deteriorate the longer the officers are employed<sup>4</sup> and while the life expectancy for the civilian population is seventy-two years, the life expectancy for police officers is only fifty-nine and a half years.<sup>5</sup>

Physical fitness in law enforcement is certainly a significant issue which must be considered by all police agencies, both large and small. Though this is a difficult task for large agencies, it is even more difficult for smaller agencies due primarily to limited personnel and financial resources. This problem is currently being faced by several of the smaller cities in

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<sup>1</sup>James P. Weiss, "Police Physical Fitness Marking Time At the Crossroads," Law and Order, March, 1987, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas R. Collingwood and Robert Hoffman, "Fit For Duty," Law and Order, July, 1996, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Glenn Caulfield, "Fit For The Force," Police Life, April, 1990.

<sup>4</sup>Collingwood and Hoffman, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Keith W. Strandberg, "Health and Fitness For Law Enforcement," Law Enforcement Technology, August, 1997, p. 38.

California with a population of less than 40,000. These cities are served by police agencies with less than forty sworn officers.

One of the most significant problems currently facing many of these cities is the number of on-duty injuries. In one city with twenty-eight sworn officers, there have been ten on-duty injuries during the last two years. Five of those injuries caused the officers to be off work for an extended period of time and one of the injuries resulted in a disability retirement.<sup>6</sup> Even when the officers are able to return to work after an injury, their duties are often restricted to office work for an additional period of time. While the officers are absent for their normal duties, it is necessary to schedule other officers to handle those duties, which frequently require overtime compensation. On-duty injuries also cause an increase in cities' worker's compensation insurance premiums. In addition, for every instance where an officer is injured, both the injured officer and the morale of the entire organization are negatively affected.

Off-duty injuries by officers are another problem which create difficulty for an organization. Although cities need not provide worker's compensation benefits to an officer injured off-duty, that officer's absence still has a negative effect on the available staffing for the organization. Like on-duty injuries, serious injuries to officers which occur off-duty can have a negative effect on the morale of the injured officer and the organization as a whole.

Other problems involving physical fitness issues experienced by police officers include a high level of sick leave usage by some officers as well as an obvious lack of physical fitness by others. For some officers, poor fitness may result in a lack of confidence and presence when confronted by negative circumstances. Offenders are more likely to resist or try to escape when

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<sup>6</sup>Interview with Michael Parker, Police Chief, City of Millbrae, December 2, 1998.

an officer does not appear to be physically fit. In addition, during a hostile situation, the officer who is not fit is more likely to escalate to a higher level of force earlier than an officer that has maintained his/her fitness.

To summarize the issue, all police agencies including those with less than forty sworn officers need to establish a comprehensive physical fitness program for all officers to maximize the officers' overall health, stability and fitness, and minimize the officers' injuries, illnesses, and other related problems which detract from the mission of the organization and quality of life for the employees.

### **THE CURRENT STATE OF FITNESS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Physical fitness has always been an important element of law enforcement. Rigorous physical training and the requirement to meet a certain standard of performance are an integral part of every police academy training program. Acceptable standards for strength, agility, and endurance must be achieved by recruits in order to complete the academy. It is expected that new officers will start their job in top physical condition, prepared to meet the demands associated with fighting crime and handling emergency situations. Police executives and administrators know the importance of keeping officers physically fit both in terms of their ability to perform their job and the image they present to the community. Unfortunately, physical fitness training usually ends when the officers leave the academy. Despite a great deal of research and information about the value of remaining physically fit, most officers are both out of shape and overweight after a few years on the job.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>William E. Chapman and Joern Gravesen, "Fitness in Law Enforcement," Unpublished Thesis, December 4, 1997, p. 8.

Relatively few law enforcement agencies have any meaningful physical fitness programs and most of the programs that do exist are voluntary with little assistance or monitoring. Results of surveys conducted since 1984 indicate between a quarter and a third of law enforcement agencies have some type of physical fitness programs, with less than a third of those being mandatory. It is interesting to note that approximately twenty percent of the agencies surveyed had mandatory weight maintenance programs, but offered no physical fitness training assistance.<sup>8</sup>

There are no universal physical fitness standards among law enforcement agencies. Although there is some consensus about the need for a physical examination and an physical agility test as part of the pre-employment screening process for police officers, there is very little agreement about physical fitness standards for in-service officers. Even the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) has not addressed the issue of physical fitness for police officers other than to require agencies to provide a pre-employment physical fitness examination using valid, useful and nondiscriminatory procedures.

With the prevalence of civil litigation in today's world, most law enforcement agencies adhere to a strict schedule for firearms training and qualification. It would clearly be unacceptable not to have established standards to assess each officer's performance with his/her firearm. This is true even though the vast majority of officers never have to fire their weapon in the line of duty. On the other hand, officers must use their physical abilities frequently during the course of their duties. Strength, endurance, and physical conditioning are often the deciding factors in an encounter between an officer and an offender. A recent study found that most officers rated their

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<sup>8</sup>Fitforce, "The Total Fitness Program For Law Enforcement Agencies," Internet, February 4, 1999.

firearms training at or above acceptable, while training in physical activity was rated unacceptable.<sup>9</sup>

In order for a physical fitness program to be successful, it must be supported by both the law enforcement agency's management and rank and file. Both groups need to recognize the benefits of such a program and they must be willing to do whatever is necessary to make the program succeed. Captain Dan P. Brant of the Mansfield, Ohio Police Department states:

You can build all the facilities you want and set all the physical fitness standards possible, but if the agency administrators are not willing to actively promote and inspire adequate fitness among their officers, and the personnel are not willing to meet them half way and sacrifice their own time and energy, nothing will change. And cops will continue to look like the doughnuts they consume.<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to note that studies conducted in both private and public organizations with physical fitness programs show a substantial savings in health-related costs. Pacific Bell estimates that its ten fitness centers built between 1990 and 1993, have already saved the company eight million dollars in health care costs.<sup>11</sup> According to the American Journal of Health Promotion, between 1980 and 1991, there were twenty-four studies published about health and fitness programs in the workplace. Results of all twenty-four studies showed a positive effect on both the organization's health benefits and the cost of health care.<sup>12</sup> In a five year study conducted by Doctor Jim Hilyer, Professor of Medicine at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, it was

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<sup>9</sup>Chapman and Gravesen, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Dan P. Brandt, "Fitness Standards," The Police Marksman, July/August, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup>Dave Murphy, "Bodywork," San Francisco Examiner, August 10, 1997, p. J1.

<sup>12</sup>R. G. McNickle, "Police Fitness: Is There Life After The Academy?" Law Enforcement News, October 15, 1996, p. 11.

found that police officers who were not physically fit cost their organizations between two and three times more for medical and lost time costs than officers who were fit.<sup>13</sup>

When considering whether or not to establish a physical fitness program for a police agency it is important to know the benefits and drawbacks of such a program. On the positive side, an effective physical fitness program for police employees can improve job performance, reduce the likelihood of excessive force, prevent health problems and reduce health care costs, reduce the number of sick days taken, provide for a longer life, better daily living, and less risk of disability.<sup>14</sup> In addition, a physically fit employee has more self-esteem and confidence and less stress. He/She is normally more effective in physical confrontations using prescribed defensive tactics and he/she is more proficient in the use of firearms.<sup>15</sup> Finally, a physical fitness program will serve to improve the professional appearance of employees which leads to increased respect and a more positive relationship with members of the community.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the drawbacks of implementing a physical fitness program include the cost of such a program. On the low end, a physical fitness program for a smaller police agency may cost approximately \$5,000 per year. This includes such costs as an annual health screening for each employee and necessary maintenance and repair on the existing exercise equipment, but it does

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<sup>13</sup>Strandberg, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup>Collingwood and Hoffman, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>David Nichols, "Establishing a Mandatory Fitness Program For Law Enforcement Agencies," Campus Law Enforcement Journal, March-April, 1994, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup>Ken Carnes, "Healthy Officers: An Asset To The Department," Police Chief, January, 1989, p. 50.

not include the purchase of any new equipment or funding for employee incentives.<sup>17</sup> The necessary physical fitness equipment can be quite expensive with the cost of one piece of equipment such as a treadmill ranging from \$4,000 to \$10,000.<sup>18</sup> Another consideration is the potential for employees to be injured while participating in a physical fitness program. Should an injury occur, it would most likely be considered a job-related injury causing the employee to receive worker's compensation benefits. One other possible drawback to a physical fitness program, particularly one that is mandatory, is resistance to the program by the police officers' union due to concerns about members' job security.<sup>19</sup>

### ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Quite often, the first approach to promoting a physical fitness program is to cite the vast amount of data which shows that such a program leads to reduced health care costs and absenteeism and improved productivity and morale. Certainly these are very persuasive reasons to initiate a physical fitness program, but they are difficult to measure objectively. Although it is important to keep track of these goals, they should not be the sole justification for a physical fitness program. A better argument for such a program is to emphasize the critical need for law enforcement officers to remain healthy and fit. If the program also saves money for the department, then all the better, but cost savings should not be the determining factor in the success or failure of the program. The ultimate focus of a physical fitness program should be to

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<sup>17</sup>Ronald J. Getz, "You Can't Afford Not To Have A Fitness Program," Law and Order, June, 1990, p. 48.

<sup>18</sup>Strandberg, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup>Mark Platte, "The Spreading Blue Line," The Los Angeles Times, January 13, 1992, p. 7:A4.

create a better department with officers who are healthier, more secure in their personal and professional lives, and better able to provide effective policing services.<sup>20</sup>

Prior to implementing a physical fitness program, the concept must be “sold” to two groups, the policy-makers and the users. The policy-makers include administrators of the department and city, those individuals responsible for budget appropriations, and the city council. The users are the individuals who will be directly affected by the program, the officers and possibly other civilian employees. According to William Chapman and Joern Gravesen:

It is unwise to underestimate the negative power of a disgruntled group of officers. For this reason, a significant effort should be made to ensure that a health program gains the approval of the personnel directly affected. Much of this effort will involve eliminating the “they’re out to get us” attitude. Department leaders should emphasize that the intentions are not only to produce more capable officers but also to help individuals become healthier and more physically fit.<sup>21</sup>

A complete medical screening policy is an important element of a comprehensive physical fitness program. The medical screening should be conducted to determine if it is safe for an individual to participate in a physical fitness program and if there should be any restrictions. The medical screening will also identify any health issues that might interfere with an individual’s ability to perform his/her law enforcement duties. In addition, the medical screening can reduce the legal liability on departments in the event the participant experiences a health related problem during exercise or in the line of duty.

Another important component of a physical fitness program is exercise counseling. It is all too common to find a department so focused on fitness assessment and meeting prescribed

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<sup>20</sup>Glenn R. Jones, “Health and Fitness Programs,” FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, July, 1992, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Chapman and Gravesen, p. 16.

standards that there is a failure to provide education and counseling to assist officers in developing healthier lifestyles. Mandating an overweight, chain smoker with high cholesterol to run a mile and half, do a round of push-ups and sit-ups twice a year is counter productive to the individual's health. Counseling is critical in a situation such as this to eliminate negative fitness habits and adopt a healthier lifestyle.<sup>22</sup>

There is often a dilemma about whether a physical fitness program for law enforcement officers should be mandatory or voluntary. In spite of the fact that a voluntary physical fitness program may seem practical, most of these programs do not achieve the desired results. Initially, there may be a high level of participation in the program, however, the number of participants is likely to drop off to a small percentage of the officers after a short time. For the most part, the officers most in need of a physical fitness program will not participate. Issues contributing to the lack of participation include inadequate knowledge of how to begin a program, the absence of clearly defined goals, little motivation or incentive to participate, and in some instances, intimidation by other officers who are not in favor of the program. Although a mandatory physical fitness program may be more controversial initially and it is certainly more difficult to get up and running, once it is in place all officers will participate and there will be meaningful results in their overall level of health.<sup>23</sup>

A mandatory physical fitness program can be made more attractive to officers by allowing them to workout while on duty. This gives each officer the opportunity to meet the program

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<sup>22</sup>Chapman and Graveson, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup>James Ness, "Mandatory Physical Fitness Standards: Issues and Concerns," The Police Chief, 1992, p. 75.

standards without the need to devote several hours of off-duty time to the task. Another perk for a mandatory physical fitness program is to make exercise resources readily available to the officers on-site. Exercise facilities on-site are far more convenient, provide flexibility of use, save time, allow monitoring, and usually prove to be more cost effective in the long run.<sup>24</sup>

### **FUTURE FORECASTING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING**

In order to forecast the future of physical fitness standards in law enforcement, a Nominal Group Technique (N.G.T.) was employed. The N.G.T. process is a structured workshop which focuses on identifying and ranking major trends and events affecting a particular issue. A trend is an ongoing occurrence which impacts the topic. An event is a single occurrence which impacts the topic. A diverse group of individuals with expertise in various areas related to the topic were selected as the N.G.T. panel for the process. Based on the input from the N.G.T. panel, the five trends likely to have the most impact on the issue in the future were:

1. Level of physical fitness education, medical health, and diet
2. Level of buy-in of the physical fitness standards by labor and management
3. Change in lifestyles and amount of time available to exercise
4. Change in employee attitude and motivation to stay fit
5. Number of workers' compensation claims

The five events likely to have the most impact on the issue in the future were:

1. Mandatory physical fitness standards set by the state, county, or city
2. Physical fitness standards set by memorandum of understanding
3. Financial incentive program established to participate in a physical fitness program
4. County Police Chiefs reach consensus on a need for mandatory physical fitness standards
5. Disciplinary action for failure to meet physical fitness standards

With likely trends and events identified, strategic planning is an approach used to bring

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<sup>24</sup>Jones, p. 7.

about positive change which will lead to favorable results in the future. It is important because it allows an organization to operate successfully in a constantly changing environment. Through strategic planning, an organization looks to the impact of both internal and external forces on significant issues. It also involves the review of different alternatives in an effort to achieve optimum results. Working with anticipated trends and events, managers are able to make decisions how to bring about those trends and events which will be beneficial to the organization and avoid others which would detract from its success.

Based on the results of the N.G.T. process as well as a review of the related literature, three alternative strategies were developed relating to the issue of physical fitness standards for law enforcement officers. Each of these strategies represents a different approach for law enforcement agencies to transition to a functional physical fitness program. The strategies are as follows:

Strategy One – Officers are encouraged to maintain an acceptable level of physical fitness. A physical fitness facility and equipment are made available for officers to use during their off-duty time. Physical fitness education and consulting are also available for officers should they desire. No physical fitness standards are set. Officers are rated on the level of their physical fitness during their annual performance appraisal.

Strategy Two – Officers are encouraged to maintain an acceptable level of physical fitness. A physical fitness facility and equipment are made available for officers to use. Each officer is required to have a medical examination annually by the city. Each officer is also required to participate in physical fitness training on-duty during each shift. An individualized physical fitness training program is developed for each officer by a professionally trained physical fitness advisor. No mandatory physical fitness standards are set, however, each officer must be certified as fit for duty during his/her annual medical examination. Officers are strongly encouraged to meet physical fitness standards which are set according to the individual's age and sex. Officers are rated biannually on their cardiovascular performance, endurance, strength, and flexibility. Those officers with an acceptable rating receive a financial incentive based on the city's savings in workers' compensation

and health care costs.

Strategy Three – Officers are required to meet mandatory physical fitness standards. Each officer is also required to have a medical examination annually by the city and must be certified as fit for duty during the examination. A physical fitness facility and equipment are made available for officers to use. Each officer may participate in physical fitness training on-duty during each shift. An individualized physical fitness training program is developed for each officer by a professionally trained physical fitness advisor. Mandatory physical fitness standards for officers are set according to the individual's age and sex. Officers are rated biannually on their cardiovascular performance, endurance, strength, and flexibility. Those officers with an acceptable rating receive a financial incentive based on the city's savings in workers' compensation and health care costs. Officers who do not receive an acceptable rating are placed on a structured performance improvement plan under the direction of a physical fitness advisor until they are able achieve an acceptable rating. Officers who do not receive an acceptable rating after a six month period on a performance improvement program may face disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Each of the alternatives has merit and each may be effective under different circumstances.

For a law enforcement agency with very physical fitness conscious and motivated employees, Alternative One may be the answer. In such an agency, there is no need for mandates or incentives for employees to maintain physical fitness. This objective is largely accomplished through a sense of individual and professional pride in combination with peer pressure from the leaders among the officer ranks. At the other end of the spectrum, Alternative Three might be suitable for an agency with employees who have shown very little interest in maintaining physical fitness. Providing a financial incentive to achieve a mandated standard with disciplinary consequences for failing to meet the standard may be the motivation necessary for employees in this type of agency. In most agencies, the employees will respond best to a physical fitness program described in Alternative Two. In this alternative, physical fitness standards are set and employees are required to exercise as part of their duty assignment. Employees who meet the

physical fitness standards are rewarded with a financial incentive, but there are no negative consequences for those who do not meet the standards.

The preferred strategy of maintaining physical fitness for law enforcement officers is Alternative Two. This alternative provides officers with a physical fitness facility, equipment, and individualized training. It also includes an annual medical examination which can identify and address any potential health risks. Officers exercise on duty as part of their normal daily assignment. This is similar to the exercise programs of other employee groups such as firefighters. As with firearms training and defensive tactics training, physical fitness training would be considered one of the necessities of the job.

With Alternative Two, reasonable physical fitness standards will be set according to the officer's age and sex. The officers will then be tested twice each year on their cardiovascular performance, endurance, strength, and flexibility. Those officers that meet the standards will receive a financial incentive based on the savings to the city for workers' compensation and health care costs. Officers participating in the incentive program will not only be motivated to exercise frequently, but they will be more likely maintain a healthy lifestyle and avoid risky behavior on duty. Officers who do not meet the physical fitness standards will not receive the financial incentive, but there will be no negative consequences associated with this.

Once the physical fitness program described in Alternative Two becomes established, it is believed that most, if not all, officers will meet the prescribed standards. The financial incentive will be a major factor in this, but just as significant will be the role that peer pressure plays in motivating officers to maintain their physical fitness. As the appearance of officers who are reaching the standards improves, those who are not putting forth the effort will stand out in a very

non-flattering way. It is further believed that the physical fitness program described in Alternative Two will provide officers with increased confidence leading to a higher level of performance and both on and off duty.

### **IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES**

In order for a physical fitness program to be successful for a law enforcement agency, a comprehensive program for implementation must be formed. Using the strategic plan which has been developed, it is necessary to anticipate the significant issues associated with getting the program started and keeping it running. By addressing these issues early on with an aggressive plan of attack, the program stands the best chance of meeting with success. Included in this section are some of the most critical issues which must be considered during the implementation process

There are several individuals who must contribute to the implementation of a physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel. Some of these individuals play a role in only part of the implementation process while others are involved throughout the entire process. For the process to work most efficiently, the individuals involved must believe in the merits of the program and be dedicated to making it a success.

Police Chief, Police Managers, and Police Supervisors – These individuals must take the lead to implement a physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel. They must develop a proposal for the program and then garner support both within and outside of the organization. Key converts to the program include the police officers' association, city council, city administrator, and human resources director. Once the program is approved, the chief, managers, and supervisors are tasked with obtaining a facility with exercise equipment, setting policy, identifying individuals to perform as a program coordinator and as physical fitness advisors, monitoring the program for effectiveness, and making any necessary changes to improve the program.

City Council and City Administrator – These individuals have the final responsibility for approving a physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel. They must weigh the benefits of such a program with the costs. They must also consider the program's effect on other programs in the city as well as other city employees. They must continue to be sensitive to the desires of the community and how this program might be beneficial in that regard. If the physical fitness program is approved by the city council and the city administrator, it is critical that those individuals support the program in both word and deed and provide the necessary resources to get the program off the ground. They must also have patience to look past some of the initial problems expected during the implementation period of the program and allow the program to become fully established before judging the effectiveness of the program.

Human Resources Director – The human resources director must work with police officials to develop a physical fitness program which balances the needs of police employees with the needs of the city organization. As the program is developed, the human resources director must take action to ensure that the program does not discriminate against any group of employees and the performance standards are fairly established and enforced. The human resources director will need to work with the risk manager to develop a formula to calculate the financial incentive for the program based on anticipated savings in workers' compensation and health care costs. The human resources director will also be responsible for scheduling an annual health examination for each police employee as well as addressing any health issues that are identified during the examination.

Training Manager – Because a physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel is considered training, the program will fall within the responsibility of the organization's training manager. Working with the physical fitness program coordinator, the training manager must identify the resources needed for the program, make certain the program is running efficiently, provide solutions to problems whenever possible and communicate other problems to the department's managers. The training manager must also monitor the program to determine if it is making a positive impact on the organization as well as the individual employees. Finally, the training manager must facilitate necessary training for the physical fitness program coordinator, physical fitness advisors, and all employees participating in the program.

Physical Fitness Program Coordinator – Once the physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel is approved, most of the "nuts and bolts" of the program will fall to the physical fitness program coordinator. This individual will have a great deal of input into the policy governing the program and he or she will oversee the daily operations of the program. The physical fitness program coordinator will select department employees to be trained as physical fitness

advisors. Working with the physical fitness advisors, the physical fitness program coordinator will supervise the daily exercise program for all department employees as well as the biannual testing for performance standards. The physical fitness program coordinator will also be responsible for monitoring the progress of the program and bringing unresolved issues of concern to the department managers.

Physical Fitness Advisors – These individuals are responsible for developing individualized exercise programs for each employee participating in the program as well as monitoring their exercise activity for results. They facilitate the biannual test for each employee to meet performance standards. They must also train employees to exercise properly and use the available equipment correctly. Physical fitness advisors must keep abreast of the most current trends and equipment related to physical fitness and make recommendations for improvements to the program to the physical fitness program coordinator.

There are a variety of resources needed to implement a physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel. The cost for these resources is expected to be at least partially off-set from savings in workers' compensation and health care costs. Unfortunately, these savings are not likely to be realized until the physical fitness program has been well-established and employees begin meeting the prescribed performance standards. Initial funding for the program may come from a workers' compensation reserve fund or the city's general fund.

Two major resources needed to start a physical fitness program are exercise equipment and a facility to house it. It is possible to arrange for employees to use a private gym or health club, however, this does not work well with the requirement that employees exercise on-duty. The preferred course of action is to dedicate space either in the police building or the immediate vicinity to be used as a physical fitness facility. The facility needs to be equipped with a combination of cardiovascular equipment and strength building equipment. The cardiovascular equipment may include a treadmill, stair climber, and stationary bicycle. For the strength building equipment, a combination of free weights and weight machines will be most effective. When

choosing the exercise equipment for the facility, it is better to have a few pieces of quality physical fitness equipment than several pieces of inferior equipment which breaks down frequently and has a limited life expectancy. In addition to the exercise equipment, items to measure the level of an individual's physical fitness are also necessary. These items include a scale, heart monitoring device, blood pressure monitoring device, and a calliper to measure muscle density.

Another resource necessary for the physical fitness program is the ability to provide an annual health examination for each employee. The examination must not only certify the employee as fit for duty, but identify any potential health risks and provide the employee with information to avoid those risks. Ideally, the health examination will be performed by a physician who is familiar with the requirements for employees in law enforcement as well as the expectations for the physical fitness program.

Training is another resource which is necessary to implement an effective physical fitness program. Funds must be set aside to provide training for the physical fitness program coordinator, physical fitness advisors, and each employee participating the physical fitness program. In addition, the services of a physical fitness consultant must be secured to assist with development of the overall program, selection of the most appropriate exercise equipment, and design of various exercise plans. The consultant must also be available to advise on difficult issues which arise relating to the program as well as those pertaining to individual employees.

The final resource necessary to implement a physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel is funding for the incentive to meet physical fitness standards. As noted previously, this cost is expected to be off-set by savings in workers' compensation and health care costs, however, these savings will not kick in immediately. The incentive needs to be set at a figure that

will entice employees to participate in the program and strive to meet the prescribed standards, but not so high that the program becomes cost prohibitive.

There are a number of strategies which can be employed which will assist with the implementation of a physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel. The following four strategies should be considered for any implementation plan:

**Communicate the Program and Benefits** – Most people just assume that law enforcement officers are in good physical condition and will be able to handle whatever comes their way. This line of thinking is even more prevalent within the field of law enforcement. It is important to communicate the reality of this issue -- that most law enforcement officers are not in good physical condition -- to policy makers, city officials, members of the public, and the officers themselves. Along with this fact, it is necessary to include the benefits of establishing a comprehensive physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel. It must be stressed that the concept of a physical fitness program is not just the whim of a few die hard physical fitness enthusiasts in law enforcement, but the benefits of such a program are well supported by existing research. In addition, anticipated trends and events indicate a strong likelihood that a physical fitness program will be required for law enforcement personnel in the not-too-distant future. If this is the case, it is much preferred by an organization to plan and implement a program on its own terms rather than be unprepared and have the program forced upon it.

**Sell the Program** – A physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel must be sold to the key individuals whose support is necessary for the program to succeed. Within a law enforcement organization, these individuals include the police chief, police managers, the vast majority of police supervisors, the informal leaders in the police officer ranks, and the leaders of the police officers' association. Outside the law enforcement organization, the program needs to be sold to the city council, city administrator, other key city officials, and influential members of the community. In some cases, it may also be necessary to sell the program to members of the media.

**Seek Buy-In** – Once the physical fitness program has been approved, it is beneficial to move gradually through the implementation process rather than attempting to bring the program on-line overnight. This allows employees to get used to the program a little bit at a time which is particularly helpful for those individuals who are less than enthusiastic about the program. As the employees realize that the requirements of the program are not unreasonable and they start to experience some of the benefits of the program, they are more likely to buy-in to the process.

All reasonable efforts should be made to gain the approval of each employee, however, it is not necessary to dwell on those few employees that continue to oppose the program. Either peer pressure will eventually bring them around to accepting the program or they will continue to be unhappy about the program and eventually find their way out of the organization.

Publicized Successes – When there are positive results from the physical fitness program, everyone associated with the program needs to hear about them. This includes each employee in the organization, the city council, city administrator, human resources director, other key city officials, and the remaining stakeholders in the process. The media can be helpful in getting word of the successes out to members of the community. It may of considerable benefit to publish an article in a professional journal documenting the success of the program. This would allow other law enforcement organizations the opportunity to review the program.

In order to determine the effectiveness of a physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel, it is necessary to establish a monitoring process for the program. This process will measure some of the changes to a law enforcement organization brought about by the physical fitness program. The criteria to be measured will include the number and severity of workers' compensation claims, the cost for worker's compensation insurance, the cost for health care benefits, the amount of sick leave used, and the number of citizen's complaints. Other criteria regarding employee performance and well-being is not as easily measured, but it can be obtained through a subjective evaluation and survey of the employees. This criteria will include the number of problems resolved by employees, the number of contacts made in the community, the number of instances where physical force was employed, as well as the employees' overall feeling of well-being and contentment with their jobs.

The physical fitness program will not be without flaws and it is important to make changes based on the results of the monitoring process, feedback from the physical fitness program coordinator and physical fitness advisors, and feedback from the participants in the program

themselves. If something is not working the way it should, then it is necessary to try something else. The program can always be improved and along with those improvements come greater gains by the employees in the organization.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

After reviewing the literature dealing with physical fitness and receiving input from a number of experts in related fields, it is quite clear that an effective physical fitness program is necessary for every law enforcement agency. Some agencies have moved forward in this area with innovative programs aimed at maintaining the physical fitness of their employees.

Unfortunately, far too many agencies have not yet begun to address this issue and it seems to be particularly true for smaller law enforcement agencies. In the research gathered during this project, a number of very worthwhile ideas about physical fitness programs were identified. These ideas can be developed further, customized, and combined to form the structure of an effective program for any law enforcement agency.

In the next ten years, it is essential that every law enforcement agency establish an effective physical fitness program for all personnel. In order for this to occur, leaders in each agency must consider the following recommendations for the program:

1. Law enforcement personnel will be required to receive an annual health examination by the city
2. A physical fitness program for law enforcement personnel will include cardiovascular activities as well as strength building exercises
3. A individualized physical fitness program will be designed for each employee by a physical fitness advisor
4. Law enforcement personnel will be required to participate in an exercise program while on-duty

5. Physical fitness standards will be established according to the age and sex of the employee
6. Employees will be tested biannually and receive a financial incentive for meeting the prescribed standards
7. The financial incentive will be funded from the savings in workers' compensation and health care costs
8. There will be no negative consequences for employees who do not meet the prescribed standards

As law enforcement officers become more physically fit, their self esteem will be bolstered and they will feel better about themselves, their job, and the organization. This will increase the productivity and morale of the organization. They will have a more confident demeanor during negative encounters with individuals. Because of this, offenders will be less likely resist or try to escape. It will not be necessary for officers to escalate force quite as quickly which will reduce injuries to both the officers and offenders as well as the related lawsuits. The physical fitness program will also provide an effective opportunity for employees to reduce stress. Finally, employees that are physically fit will present a better image for the organization and they will be more effective in meeting the needs of the community.

Strong leaders in law enforcement recognize that the most important resources in their organizations are their employees. A top notch police facility with state of the art equipment and innovative practices is meaningless without quality employees who are committed to making the organization run effectively. Leaders have an obligation to provide for the well-being of their employees. This goes beyond providing fair wages and benefits, sound equipment, and ample training. It goes to the overall wellness of each employee and a big portion of this relates to

physical fitness. It seems that when the physical fitness piece of the puzzle is in place, all the other surrounding pieces are likely to fall into place. Employees are healthier and happier and the organization reaps the benefits from this.

It is impossible to predict with absolute certainty what will occur for law enforcement agencies in the future. Crime trends, available funding, technology, and the level of public support will greatly impact law enforcement in 2010. Some of the policing programs that are in vogue today will be past history in ten years and new programs will take their place. With foresight and proper planning, law enforcement agencies will be more effective in meeting the needs of society in the coming years.

If there are to be meaningful physical fitness standards for law enforcement personnel in 2010, the planning process needs to start now. Leaders need to push for a physical fitness program and persist when they do not immediately get results. If one approach is not effective, they need to try something else. The worst thing that could happen is that leaders do not address this issue hoping that things will turn out alright. Things will not turn out alright and, if nothing is done, things are likely to deteriorate. The principal message to today's law enforcement leaders is thus: You have the ability to improve the quality of life for the people in your organization and thereby, the effectiveness of your organization. Start the planning process for a physical fitness program now and stay with it until it comes to pass. There will be some problems and mistakes along the way, but the end product will be well worth the effort.

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