

# **Physical Fitness and Law Enforcement**

Lieutenant Thomas Suminski  
Roseville Police Department  
Eastern Michigan University

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper will examine the importance of physical fitness in the realm of law enforcement. It will look at the problems associated with unhealthiness and in particular how this affects the job performance of police officers. It will consider what different states and agencies, such as the FBI, require for their officers. Finally, it will make recommendations for implementing a continuing fitness program for officers during their career.

The primary purpose was to present ideas on how to implement a program that would continuously require officers to maintain their health and fitness. This purpose was accomplished primarily by Internet research. Various standards of different states and agencies were compared.

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## INTRODUCTION

A law enforcement officer should be in the best physical fitness at all times, as it is a requirement from the day they start their training at the police academy. They train through many different types of conditions that they must endure and be able to sustain. The sad thing is that there are so many police officers that do not continue to exercise and work out, nor do they keep themselves physically fit in body and in mind.

A police officer must be able to protect the public as they have sworn under oath to serve and protect. If they are not in good shape they will not be able to handle many situations such as having to chase a suspect on foot that they believe has committed a crime. Once they are able to capture the suspect they then have to restrain this person. Not only will they have to use their physical strength, they must also be able to withstand the stressful and dangerous situation that they are in.

In the public eye when a citizen sees a police officer on the street, this officer represents and is a symbol of the entire force. A trim and fit officer can send the right message to the community and this includes criminals also. The overweight donut-munching stereotype may soon become a thing of the past if proper programs are implemented to stress the importance of physical fitness among law enforcement officers

and that emphasizes continuing physical fitness throughout an officer's career.

## BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Physical fitness is a problem that plagues the nation. Today, a large majority of the population is unhealthy. This becomes a significant problem when one of these people is a police officer. Police officers have physically strenuous jobs and it is crucial that they be in top physical health in order to perform their job to the best of their abilities. Their physical fitness is essential to ensure the safety of themselves, their fellow officers, and most importantly, the public, in other words, during a physical confrontation with a subject, the officer must be able to control the subject, talk to the subject, and be able to physically secure him or her. Physical fitness of a police officer is an essential part of survival.

"Fitness is very important for two reasons: one is the fit for duty aspect," says Lieutenant Arnold G. Walker, Fitness Director, Buffalo Police Department Academy. "We need to be fit enough to perform the kinds of duties we are hired to do (chase a suspect, go into a bar and break up a brawl), and the second aspect is longevity. There is a great difference between the longevity in civilian population and in law enforcement. The average American male lives to be 72 years old, while the average law enforcement officer lives to be 59.5. This is

because of poor lifestyle habits, and these habits are associated with aspects of the job (irregular hours, short meal periods). It is also a high stress job, and you do not get a lot of exercise through the actual job, or very stressful exercise." (Strandberg, 2004). A fit officer is a better officer," Walker continues. They are able to do their job better, and they feel better about themselves. It reduces sick time, reduces injuries on duty, and it reduces the incidence of cardiovascular disease." (Strandberg, 2004).

## Literature Review

- Blum, Jon. (2000). The Supervisor's Role, <http://www.jus.state.nc.us/ncja/w-jb-ffle.htm>.
  - This article was extremely useful in coming up with recommendations for how to implement continuing programs. It took a stance from the supervisor's position and was helpful in giving good ideas.
  
- Ebling, Patti. (October 2002). Physical Fitness in Law Enforcement: Follow the Yellow Brick Road, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/2002/oct02leb.pdf>.
  - This article was helpful in describing the FBI's Challenge. However, it was full of information that merely boasted on behalf of the FBI rather than providing concrete information.
  
- MCOLES Physical Fitness Pre-Enrollment Test, <http://www.michigan.gov>.
  - This source was very useful in describing the beginning requirements for MI officers at the academy.
  
- Michigan Physical Fitness Committee. (May 2002). Fit for Duty Manual, *Physical Fitness Program*.
  - This resource was particularly helpful in examining the diet of officers and to give suggestions to improve eating habits.
  
- Mississippi Police Corps, Let's Get Physical, <http://www.usm.edu/policecorps/fitness.html>.
  - This was a useful source in examining another state's standards. It contained a good description of Mississippi's tests.

- Richard, Karin.(2003). Justifying and Validating a Department Fitness Program, *NLETA Online Magazine*, <http://www.nleta.com/articles/justifyingandvalidatingdeptfitnessprogram.html>.
  - This article was extremely helpful overall. It had a good outline and had something to help stimulate ideas for almost each section of the paper.
  
- Strandberg, Keith W. (2004) *Health and Fitness for Law Enforcement*, [http://www.sportsartfitness.com/fitness\\_law.php](http://www.sportsartfitness.com/fitness_law.php).
  - This article was helpful because it contained interview information of actual officers.

## PROCEDURE

The research for this paper was comprised primarily of searching the Internet and a review of various manuals, newspaper articles, and magazine articles. In addition, discussions with fellow officers gave great insight in preparing this paper.

The search for materials focused on the physical and mental stresses of police officers. The goal of the paper was to show how physical fitness would alleviate these stressors, to stress the importance of such fitness, to review various programs, and to make recommendations on how to implement a fitness program.

While there was an abundance of research, the majority of materials basically repeated the same information. It was difficult to find an extensive amount of relevant useful research. Many of the websites had extensive physical fitness charts that only a medical expert would be able to decode, and it was hard to tie these in to the overall concept of the paper. Basically, the information was either too basic and repetitive or it was too detailed in percentages and specific health statistics. Furthermore, since there was so much information available through the Web, it was hard to sift through all of the available materials that might lead to one good article.

## DISCUSSION

### *Problems Associated with Being Out of Shape and Importance of Good Health*

"Policing is sometimes strenuous, constantly demanding, and often frustrating. Far too many officers fall into the trap and become caught up in the demands and frustrations of the job. When this happens, their personal lives as well as their job performance fall prey to the trap and suffer. Frustrations and anger are often directed toward loved ones and fellow officers. These stresses can be overcome by conditioning-physical exercise. Physical fitness in itself is discipline, the discipline to keep active and remain in good condition. The advantages of exercise far outweigh the excesses of inactivity." (Blum, 2000).

Physical fitness can only increase the effectiveness of an officer's duties. It is important because it is a good measure of the overall level of "health and wellness" of a police officer. (Richard, 2003). Moreover, physical fitness is important for a healthy heart and body. An officer that is physically fit is going to be able to be at a healthy weight, to have a strong body, and to be at a lower risk of disease and injury.

There are so many factors that operate against an officer. Something as simple as the belt that is worn by a police officer is an aggravating circumstance which can cause back injuries. With all the items that are on the belt, it is a significant weight on an officer. Officers that are in top physical shape are more likely to "have a reduced incidence of back injuries." (Richard, 2003). This is one of many reasons why exercise on a regular basis is important and necessary for any member of law enforcement. Physical fitness also aids in weight control. (Richard, 2003).

Conditioning and training takes strong commitment and dedication on the officers' part. What happens after a police officer is on the force for a while is that they tend to slack off and the habits of overeating and lack of exercise settle in. Unfortunately, this means nothing but problems for the officers because good health and fitness can only be effective for them by way of a lifelong commitment of exercise and proper diets. Officers have to be able to cope with dramatic increases in heart rates due to stress or physical exertion, this is all the more reason for them to take exercise and diet important, and as their way of survival in the job they have chosen.

#### *Dietary Nutrition*

It is nearly impossible for a law enforcement officer to achieve health and fitness goals without a proper nutrition program. The human body needs food for fuel and the human body will not function if you do not have a well balanced diet. It is much easier to follow a proper nutrition program when you can understand how the body converts food into fuel. The basics are water, carbohydrates, proteins and vitamins. (MI Fitness Committee, 2002).

Water is the body's most important nutrient. Water is essential and helps to maintain body temperature, flush all of the toxins in your system and transport nutrients. (MI Fitness Committee, 2002).

Carbohydrates are also important in the realm of health and fitness. They fuel the body. Foods such as breads, grains, cereals, pastas, fruits and vegetables are full of complex carbohydrates, also known as starches and fibers. Fiber is vital to the body . If you eat more carbohydrates than the body can store, the excess is converted to fat.

Proteins are also essential for the growth and repair of all body tissues. Proteins are not an efficient source of

energy, and it is only used for energy in extreme cases when no carbohydrates or fat is available.

Vitamins are essential nutrients that regulate biochemical reactions. They are helpers in many cell functions. Vitamins cannot give you energy, but they are necessary in helping your body make energy.

Police officers are just like most of the population these days. The days are just not long enough. Everyone tends to be in a hurry all the time. That is how an average police officer's day is everyday. This is why they consume so much fast food. The fast foods contain a large amount of fat, but yet make it easy just to go through the drive-through window and order so officers can drive and eat at the same time. A fast food restaurant allows an individual to stay in the car. You do not even have to get out of the car which further contributes to a lack of body activity. "The key to eating for fitness is understanding how the body uses food and choosing the right foods and the right portions. An officer can simply choose healthier alternatives at fast food restaurants. For instance, a McDonald's cheeseburger contains 305 calories and 13 grams of fat. Contrast these figures to a Big Mac at McDonald's which has 600 calories and 33 grams of fat. (MI Fitness Committee, 2002). See Appendix A for examples of 500 calories fast food meals.

*Michigan Standards*--The Michigan Commission of Law Enforcement (MCOLES)

The Mcoles has established the Health and Wellness and Physical Fitness Training program within Basic Police Training in Michigan. "The training program includes education in health and wellness as well as instilling an appreciation for the benefits and methods to attain and maintain a physically fit life style." (MCOLES Physical Fitness Pre-Enrollment Test).

In order to benefit fully from this program, a general fitness test was developed for use in accordance with the training of the officers. The MCOLES Physical Fitness test "ensures that basic training graduates have attained a level of fitness appropriate for job performance capability and longevity." (MCOLES Physical Fitness Pre-Enrollment Test). "In addition, all recruits are required to pass an exit test at the completion of the physical fitness traing program in order to graduate from an academy." (MCOLES Physical Fitness Pre-Enrollment Test).

The MCOLES physical fitness is made up of four events, which must be given in the order listed below:

<u>Event</u>	<u>Area Tested</u>
Vertical Jump	Lower Body Strength

Sit-Ups	Core Body Strength
Push-Ups	Upper Body Strength
One-Half Mile Shuttle Run	Cardio-Respiratory Fitness

The tests have minimum performance standards that are broken up by age and sex. (See Appendix B). In addition, see Appendix C for a comparison/contrast of Iowa's minimum physical fitness requirements.

Interestingly, "an agency may consider using these performance requirements for conducting a diagnostic test as an evaluation or screening tool during the hiring process. However, an applicant must pass an official pre-enrollment test at an academy training site prior to enrollment." (MCOLES Physical Fitness Pre-Enrollment Test). As one can see, physical fitness is an initial requisite but further implementation and requirements later diminish.

#### *FBI Standards*

"For several decades, the FBI has trained law enforcement professionals and, in the process, has created a testament to the importance of physical, as well as mental, preparedness." (Ebling, 2002). The FBI stresses the importance of fitness because officers must remain physically capable to perform their duties. In addition, exercise is helpful because it can help

them combat the stress associated with the emotional pressure of their profession. However, "as an occupation, law enforcement holds the distinction of having the highest rate of heart disease, diabetes, and suicide out of 149 professions." (Ebling, 2002).

"The FBI's Focus on Fitness program emphasizes cardiovascular and strength training. The agency tests its agents on their physical fitness and encourages them to maintain these fitness levels throughout their careers. Law enforcement officers who remain physically fit prove more readily able to cope with the day-to-day stress of the job and are better prepared to handle critical incidents." (Ebling, 2002).

In recognition of this, the FBI established the "Focus on Fitness program" to promote the health and wellness of its special agents. This led later to the development of the FBI Fitness Challenge. The Challenge is named after characters in the *Wizard of Oz*. (Ebling, 2002). It includes rope climbing, running, belly crawling, etc.

#### *Examples of Other States Standards*

##### Mississippi

"Physical fitness is vital to law enforcement officers for many reasons; accordingly, the Mississippi Police Corps (MPC)

has designed a rigorous training regime, administered daily throughout the academy that challenges students to significantly improve their overall physical condition." (Mississippi Police Corps).

In order to be admitted into the police corps program, an applicant must be successful in his/her attempt to complete various tests, including a physical fitness examination. After the test is successfully completed, some of the applicants are further subject to other tests with the agency they are gaining employment from. (Mississippi Police Corps). "These tests, which are not required by all agencies, vary by department and may include practical exercises such as pushing a car or climbing over a wall." (Mississippi Police Corps).

"The physical fitness test used by the MPC is mandated by the Mississippi Board on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training, and all Mississippi law enforcement officers must successfully complete this test in order to be certified by the state." The test is comprised of four separate events. These events include push-ups, trunk flexion, agility run, and a 1.5-mile run. All events are timed except fore the trunk flexion. The test is age and gender normed. (Mississippi Police Corps).

Each candidate must score at least a 60 percent or better on the entry test. Once admitted, students will have to get a at least an 80 percent or better on the final test in order to

graduate. Both tests are the same, but only the requirement of percentages are different. Additionally, applicants must meet body-fat standards. (Mississippi Police Corps).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A common theme throughout the above mentioned standards is that tests are given in the beginning during academy training. The testing generally stops once one becomes an officer. That is when the physical fitness of officers declines rapidly.

A supervisor can play an extremely important role in implementation and continuation of a fitness program. (Blum, 2002). Every supervisor must make the first step in developing a program that meets the needs of their officers and commit to having a fit force since their physical condition can mean the difference between life or death.

The first step is for the supervisor to familiarize himself with basic health knowledge including physical health, diet, etc. They then must get administrative approval, such as from the chief or sheriff. (Blum, 2000).

Officers need direction from their superiors to look closely at their fitness levels so that their on the job performance is what it should be. Maybe they could encourage the squad to work out with them and try to set up times and dates where everyone could meet together. This would be ideal if the department has a gym. (Blum, 2000). Another idea if they do not have a gym is to join their local YMCA.

Implementing a fitness program can be one of the most beneficial factors in a police officers life that can only

increase the health of the officers and their survival chances when they are out on the street and faced with danger. It will also help them to have more confidence in themselves and in time the officers will see the positive aspects of the fitness program and hopefully enjoy themselves and boost their morale. Awards could be given for the "most-improved." In addition, competitive races involving the public could be arranged. (Blum, 2000). Other ideas include joining sports leagues or planning field days where the officers families could come for a picnic. Incorporating fun into the workout could be a strong motivational factor.

Since physical fitness programs generally are not enforced after the academy, supervisors should step up and enforce a continuing fitness program. Simple ideas as the ones above can make a huge difference in the health and well-being of an officer.

## REFERENCES

Blum, Jon. (2000). The Supervisor's Role,  
<http://www.jus.state.nc.us/ncja/w-jb-ffle.htm>.

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**APPENDIX A**

25 Grams of Fat or Less	Calories	Fat
PIZZA HUT		
Cheese 2 slices	400	17
Salad	25	0
1 Tablespoon Ranch	55	6
TOTAL	480	23

ARBY'S		
Regular Roast Beef	380	18
Salad	25	0
1 Tablespoon Italian	70	7
TOTAL	475	25

**APPENDIX B**

## MCOLES PRE-ENROLLMENT PHYSICAL FITNESS TEST MINIMUM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

**Male**

Age Group	Vertical Jump	Sit-Ups	Push-Ups	½ Mile Shuttle Run
18-29	17.5	32	30	4:29.6
30-39	16.0	30	30	4:38.2
40 +	15.0	30	28	4:54.7

**Female**

Age Group	Vertical Jump	Sit-Ups	Push-Ups	½ Mile Shuttle Run
18-29	11.0	28	7	5:35.4
30-39	9.0	19	7	5:59.1
40 +	8.0	18	7	6:13.3

**APPENDIX C****IOWA MINIMUM PHYSICAL FITNESS PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS CHART  
STANDARDS****Male**

Test	20-29 Years	30-39 Years	40-49 Years	50-59 Years	60 + Years
Sit and Reach	16.5	15.5	14.3	13.3	12.5
1 Minute Sit Up	38	35	29	24	19
1 Minute Push Up	29	24	18	13	10
1.5 Mile Run	12:51	13:36	14:29	15:26	16:43

**Female**

Test	20-29 Years	30-39 Years	40-49 Years	50-59 Years	60 + Years
Sit and Reach	19.3	18.3	17.3	16.8	15.5
1 Minute Sit Up	32	25	20	14	6
1 Minute Push Up	15	11	9	*12	*5
1.5 Mile Run	15:26	15:57	16:58	17:54	18:44

\*Females in excess of 49 years of age may do push ups on their knees.

Information from, <http://ci.muscataine.ia.us/police/test.pdf>.