



HEALTH & FITNESS PROGRAMMING:

What EVERY *Public Safety Administrator* Should Know

“Law enforcement executives who fail to incorporate fitness and health programs in their management strategy create significant liability exposure for their agencies as well as health risks for their employees.”

Myth: *“Without standards, a program just will not work.”*

Fact: Without a program, standards will not work.

The goal is behavior change— changes in fitness and lifestyle behaviors must take place before officer or agency truly benefit.

Myth: *“It’s management’s responsibility; I’m not doing anything for nothing.”*

Fact: A recent review of workers’ compensation claims in a state with a presumption law revealed that the majority of the claims were due to off-duty cardiovascular events; most were found to be non-compensable and preventable!

Myth: *“It’s labor’s responsibility, we pay them – they should take care of themselves and their fitness.”*

Fact: In one jurisdiction, communities and their police departments were informed their health insurance premiums would become cost-prohibitive if a health and fitness program was not installed.

Myth: *“A program is too expensive for us to undertake.”*

Fact: The cost of doing business: Industry estimates suggest several dollars are returned for every dollar invested in a health and fitness program.

The cost of not doing business: One high profile negligent training decision with respect to physical fitness was worth \$400,000.00 (in 1983 dollars!) to the plaintiff.

Myth: *“Cops (or firefighters or trash collectors...) are different and nobody understands our (health and fitness) needs.”*

Fact: FitForce™ is a full-service total fitness entity serving the public safety community for over 10 years. Our programs and services have assisted hundreds of local, state and federal agencies in fulfilling their mandate to ensure a capable workforce for the communities they serve.

Let's start with the job...

Our collective experience includes conducting validation studies for over 130 agencies.

In addition we have reviewed another 150 job task surveys and job descriptions, as well as an FBI report in which experts defined essential job tasks. Taken together, that information identifies a core of physical tasks required of all law enforcement officers.

Core Physical Tasks for Law Enforcement

Global Physical Tasks:

Searching

Controlling and arresting

Lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling objects and persons

Driving

Foot pursuits

Specific Frequent Tasks:

Driving

Standing

Climbing stairs

Walking

Specific Critical Tasks:

Running

Jumping and dodging obstacles

Using force

Pushing or pulling heavy objects

In fact, we can quantify those tasks identified:

- Running: the majority of the time running tasks are less than 1 minute, approximately 11% of the time they exceed 2 minutes
- Climbing over fences, typically 5' tall, 2-3 flights of stairs
- Jumping/vaulting typically over obstacles 3' or less

- Use of force: in over 75% of the incidences, the amount of resistance is moderate to strong; the duration of the event is 30 – 120 seconds, with 25% lasting more than 2 minutes.

FACT:

That 'moderate to strong resistance' is likely to come from a 21 year old male, 5'-10" tall, 160 pounds, with 6% body fat and possessing good to excellent aerobic capacity. This is the average physical profile derived from a recent study of over 900 arrestees from one jurisdiction in a mid-Atlantic state.

The take-away point is that the job of a law enforcement officer is at times a physically demanding one and in instances where an arrest is made, the arrestee is most likely to be a young, very fit male.

What about the people doing the job?

Data reaching back to the early 1980's suggest the average police officer demonstrates average to poor fitness compared to civilians their age and gender (remember the average arrestee – 21, male). These data were repeated in 1992 in the Pennsylvania State University Aging Study of officers in six large metropolitan agencies. This survey's data point to below average aerobic fitness and body fat levels and slightly higher than average muscular strength and flexibility for the officers participating ***-the officers were stronger and more flexible than average, but were fatter and less aerobically fit.***

Officers 21 – 35 had slightly higher than average fitness while those 36 – 55 had slightly

lower than average fitness when compared to civilians of their age and gender adjusted cohort.

The health profiles of officers on the job are equally disheartening.

Major Chronic Health Problems

<u>Condition</u>	<u>% of Officers with Condition</u>
Obesity	20 – 50%
High Cholesterol	20 – 35%
Back & Orthopedic Problems	15 – 25%
Hypertension	16 – 20%

One study of officers in a major department reported 88% of its officers had at least one primary risk factor for **Coronary Artery Disease**, 65% had two, 48% had three, and 31% of its officers had four primary risk factors. [This study was conducted before a fifth primary risk factor was added.]

The take away point is the people occupying this at times demanding job are for the most part unfit (compared to those they may have to arrest) and perhaps unhealthy as well.

These factors combined with the job conditions no doubt contribute to this commonly reported statistic:

Law enforcement officers on average live 2 – 6 years post retirement.

This statistic in light of the average life expectancy for an adult male in the United States (+78 yrs. of age) bears a strong witness to the need for an intervention.

So...what happens when these conditions collide?

It only takes one incident to cast a bright light on the ramifications of not having a health and fitness initiative. We have some indication from *Parker v DC*. Parker who filed suit over injuries he sustained while being arrested by Officer Hayes of the Metropolitan District of Columbia Police Department. Hayes, a decorated Vietnam veteran and police officer had recently returned to light duty after a shoulder injury. Assigned to a warrant delivery detail, Hayes was unable to extract Parker from a hijacked vehicle, likely because of his injured shoulder. He shot Parker twice, once in the spine paralyzing him from the waist down, during the course of effecting the arrest.

The lower court which found for Parker, citing among other things the department's lack of a fitness program, awarded the plaintiff \$400,000.00 in 1982. In 1983, the United States Court of Appeals upheld the ruling, stating in part:

“Officer Hayes’ conduct was the result of *deliberate indifference* (emphasis added) on the part of the District with respect to the physical training of its police officer.”

Over the long haul, the results are no less profound

As an occupational group, law enforcement officers have greater morbidity and mortality rates than the general public due to cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, and suicide.

This comes at a significant cost. In fact, various law enforcement agencies have calculated the cost of an in-service heart attack to be \$400,000.00 - \$750,000.00! Further, national accident, injury, and illness data have clearly established that 20% of the average law enforcement agency's workforce is responsible for 80% of the cost of these incidents.

A Review of Workers' Compensation Claims

In 2002, on behalf of NLC Mutual Insurance Company, Risk Probe, Inc.

conducted a review of heart/hypertension-related claims involving police officers insured by a state municipal league self-insured pooling organization. A second review of the same state produced results that supported the earlier findings.

Most recently, a sample of 295 workers' compensation claims filed by local government employees included 101 (34%) submitted by law enforcement officers. Of that number, 87 (86%) involved heart/hypertension-related incidents – many suffered off-duty and found to be non-compensable.

Finally, if the big, single incident doesn't get you, consider:

- Health insurance premiums are rising more than 15% per year
- Workers' compensation rates are rising 2 – 3% per year
- More fit and active officers have 40 – 70% less absenteeism
- The estimated cost of early disability is 165% of an officer's salary
- Fit officers are less likely to suffer degenerative diseases, thereby spending a smaller share of the agency's health care dollars
- Fitness and health programs increase loyalty, reduce turnover, and generally improve morale.

The take away point is all parties - labor, management, and host community - bear significant cost(s) when a relatively unfit, unprepared, and apparently unhealthy workforce continues to operate without a health and fitness program.

Quick review so far...

1. Law enforcement is at times a physically demanding job requiring the safe, effective performance of critical tasks.
2. Therefore, the agencies have a reasonable, legal, and logical responsibility to ensure a fit and able workforce.
3. However, occupational studies suggest the workforce, as a whole may be neither fit nor healthy.
4. The result of this conflict may be personally, legally, and financially profound.

By now some agreement exists as to the conditions and the possible consequences. A TOTAL FITNESS PROGRAM benefits the officer, the agency, and the community at large. This plan simultaneously considers the officers' health and fitness/performance status. The agency recognizes that in order to get and maintain both, it must teach and support positive lifestyle habits. The foundations of the agency based total fitness program:

- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Weight Management

- Tobacco Cessation
- Substance Abuse Prevention
- Stress Management
- Health Risk Management

are introduced at the outset and reinforced throughout the officers' careers. This can be achieved within the current constructs of recruit and in-service training.

Health

Because of the ADA, agencies cannot require their officers to be healthy. But there should be a tremendous incentive to promote healthy lifestyles. If you don't do it for the right reason, at least consider the financial benefits of a healthier workforce. More than 50% of the deaths in this country every year are attributable to lifestyle choices:

- **Sedentary lifestyle** – less than 10% of the adult population exercises vigorously three times/week
- **Poor nutrition** significantly contributes to the development of diabetes and colon cancer- both of which have a much higher incidence in law enforcement
- **Obesity** (+25% body fat for males and +30% for females) significantly affects performance and officer appearance, in addition to a host of other health issues. Medical costs for obese officers may be up to \$2500 per year more than costs for officers maintaining a healthy weight
- **Cigarette smoking** accounts for almost 390,000 deaths annually and \$15 billion in health care costs

- **Alcohol abuse** affects approximately 18 million Americans with costs estimated over \$100 billion
- **Stress** accounts for up to two thirds of all visits to primary-care physicians and stress management is consistently identified as an in-service training priority for agencies.

Fitness

In the occupational setting, *two significant performance concerns* exist: the ability to perform physically on the job, and in leisure time pursuits such as an exercise program.

An effective physical fitness program focuses on:

- **Cardiovascular Endurance** refers to the body's ability to take in and use oxygen to sustain activity
- **Anaerobic Power** is the ability to perform short, intense bouts of work, often rapidly
- **Muscular Strength** refers to the ability to generate maximal force one time
- **Muscular Endurance** is the ability to sustain a sub-maximal force over time
- **Flexibility** refers to the ability to use the available range of motion at a given joint structure
- **Body Composition** is typically referred to as a percent body- fat; this expresses a ratio of fat to lean tissue.

The Total Fitness Program can produce a host of benefits for participants and agency alike. By improving **personal fitness levels**, officers will enjoy:

- Improved capability to perform specific tasks;
- Improved ability to mobilize the body efficiently;
- Improved tolerance to fatigue;
- Decreased risk of injury during physical tasks;
- Better psychological preparation;
- Decreased stress and health risks.

The Elements of a Successful Total Fitness Program

A number of characteristics, both personal and organizational, must be in place to ensure a successful program. Starting at the top, there must be a real commitment from the community and the command staff to sustain the program over the long haul. Staff, identified as leaders (fitness coordinators), should be respected, good communicators, and committed to a healthy, fit lifestyle (though not necessarily the most fit officer). All should recognize and support the notion that behavior change is the foundation of the educationally based program. Although the specific nature and offerings may vary from agency to agency, here are

THE TEN ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL TOTAL FITNESS PROGRAM.

1. A **trained and well-oriented leadership** at the highest levels is an essential, first element of the agency based program.

FitForce Recommendation:

This is critical to the success for any program. The administration may need instruction and training on issues such as legal concerns, budget, and policy and procedure, with an overall emphasis on behavior modification.

2. Program Coordinator is the personal face of the program.

FitForce Recommendation:

The *peer counselor* model has many values including capitalizing on internal resources and employing fitness staff intimately familiar with the target population – themselves. KSA's include participant screening for safe participation, assessing current levels of fitness, setting goals, prescribing exercise, and basic safety.

3. Health screening clears the participants for testing or exercise.

FitForce Recommendation:

This program element is not be concerned with mandatory medical examinations, though they can serve similar functions.

Nearly every agency that has conducted health screening has identified at least one officer in need of additional referral, often resulting in a life saving intervention.

However, a few simple questions will determine that most people can safely participate in an exercise program. Additional low cost health screens may include blood pressure, resting heart rate, and whole blood analysis for blood lipids to include triglycerides, cholesterol, and blood glucose.

4. A **fitness assessment** is the follow-up to the health screen.

FitForce Recommendation:

The agency fitness coordinator would be trained to conduct valid field measure of physical fitness using equipment that is both inexpensive and readily available. These fitness tests measure the underlying abilities for all of the physical tasks an officer may be called upon to perform. A written *activity questionnaire* is also a valuable tool to assess fitness.

5. **Goal setting** is a process that establishes a set of outcomes that are measurable, articulable, systematic, and progressive.

FitForce Recommendation:

The fitness coordinator assesses the current level of fitness of the participant and together they establish the goals. To be effective, goals must be challenging yet attainable, realistic in light of the current level of fitness and short-term. Goals may be tied to incentives or some other motivational tool.

6. **Planning** can take many forms including exercise prescription, nutritional and lifestyle planning, or an activity program

FitForce Recommendation:

All plans and prescriptions are based on current levels of fitness or activity and the previously established goals. The fitness coordinator with the participant apply the principles of specificity, progression, overload, adaptation, balance, moderation and regularity to come up with a plan of action to meet the goals.

7. **Education** is a cornerstone of the agency-based **Total Fitness Program**.

FitForce Recommendation:

The goal is to provide all personnel with the information necessary to enact healthy, long-lasting changes to their lifestyle. Starting with recruits and continuing throughout their careers, officers will need *information about how to change, positive experience with that change, and continued reinforcement to maintain the change*. To ensure this process is valid, administration and program leadership will need ongoing education themselves, particularly in the face of staff turnover. **This element is perhaps the most critical.**

8. **Ongoing support** for the program is needed from up and down the chain of command.

FitForce Recommendation

Support for the program takes many forms including monitoring, feedback both to participants and administration, concerning progress and program effectiveness, newsletters, subscriptions to publications and, the most genuine form of support, leading by example. Perhaps the most important contribution the administration can make is to provide on-duty time for fitness training.

9. A plan to **phase in** the program is the final element of the **Total Fitness Program**.

FitForce Recommendation:

Most agencies will choose to begin the program with recruits, since fitness is typically inculcated at that level. Others may choose to start with an incumbent in-service program.

In order to be successful, however, the program must eventually include all personnel, perhaps even non-sworn personnel.

10. **Standards** are the tenth – *optional* element.

FitForce Recommendation:

Historically, agencies have fallen into one of a three categories: *no standards at all; with applicant/recruit standards only, and considering incumbent standards with no consideration as to a program.* The mission of an agency fitness program is to ensure officers are capable of performing the essential physical tasks of the job; the role of *valid standards* is to predict whether the officers will be able to perform those duties when they are called upon. Together they provide the most assurance for the agency, officer and community.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A

TOTAL FITNESS PROGRAM

- A Trained and Well-Oriented Leadership
- Program Coordinator
- Health screening
- Fitness Assessment
- Goal Setting
- Planning
- Education
- Ongoing Support
- Phase-In Plan
- Standards (***optional***)

Final thoughts on our report

Hiring, budget and staff retention are the *frequent and critical* concerns of the public safety administrator. The most successful administrators look at the short- and long-term view of these operational considerations. A health and fitness program likewise must be considered with the short- and long-term view. Such a program is a wise investment; begun at the earliest phases of the hiring process, it will yield dividends for the duration of an officer's career. Administration must thoroughly consider the scope and nature of the Total Fitness Program, develop the components appropriately, and commit the resources necessary; a three to five year initial commitment is reasonable. *Standards* may be applied, but they may not replace a comprehensive program. The administrator who implements a Total Fitness Program helps to ensure a capable workforce, prepared to perform the frequent and critical physical functions of their officers.

About FitForce™

FitForce™ is committed to finding Total Fitness Solutions for the public safety community we serve. Our pledge is to provide our clients with the very best scientific, legal and practical training and education, validation of selection and retention standards, policy and procedure analysis and development, as well as ongoing administration, arbitration and litigation support.

FitForce™ and its consultant team together have over 60 years of public safety physical fitness experience. This includes: over 100 articles, columns, chapters, books and technical reports, experience with over 200 agencies and their representatives, over 130 validation studies and a database of over 4000 randomly selected law enforcement officers at agencies for whom we've developed standards. *If you would like to discuss how we could be of assistance to your agency, please call us at 978.745.3629.*