TELEMASP BULLETIN

TEXAS LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM

October 1997 Vol. 4, No. 7

Post-Academy Fitness Programs
Part I

Introduction

Recent research has found that many Americans are physically inactive, have poor eating habits, and are overweight (Blair 1995; Hockey 1993; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997). In fact, as a group, Americans are more overweight and do less rigorous exercise than at any time in history. This comes partly as a result from a move toward an Information Age, requiring little physical activity, and away from the days of the Industrial and Agricultural eras. The conscquence of these events involve commensurate increases in many associated health complications including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, lower back pain, and some cancers (Blair 1995; Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research 1996; Hockey 1993).

Perhaps the most significant statement concerning physical activity and health was the first-ever Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1996) which clearly articulates the importance of physical exercise. The Report recommends that Americans accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week. The Report concludes that physical activity reduces the risk of developing chronic illnesses, such as coronary heart disease and hypertension. Furthermore, the Report asserts that regular physical exercise reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, improves mood, and enhances one's ability to perform daily tasks.

Despite this upsurge of health promotion in the workplace exhibited by corporate America, few police departments are implementing such programs. Law enforcement agencies rarely initiate physical fitness programs despite the adverse health consequences associated with policing (Garner 1991, 1994). Law enforcement officers do not escape the health dilemmas affecting the general population. In fact, many researchers have indicated that police officers are more vulnerable to lifestyle-related diseases, such as obesity and cardiovascular disease (Charles 1983; Getz 1990; Kuntz 1988; Mostardi et al. 1986; Wood et al. 1982), due to continuous exposure to high levels of stress, poor nutrition, excessive cigarette smoking, and a lack of physical activity (Arters and Aaron 1989).

Background

Physical fitness not only enables officers to better handle the psychologically stressful environment in which many work and live, but also is essential to job performance. Several researchers have illustrated the relationship between physical fitness and enhanced job productivity (Arters and Aaron 1989; Charles 1983; Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research 1996; Collingwood 1995; Fraser 1986; Nichols 1994; Pilant 1995). For example, Charles (1983) has stated that "physically sound officers will be better able to respond successfully to emergency situations requiring high degrees of physical effort" (p. 252). Carmean (1984) supported this notion by stating that "if the officer is unable to respond with appropriate strength and force, he or the public may suffer serious injury or death" (p. 42).

The interest in police physical fitness programming is not a recent phenomenon (Serra 1984). For example, a 1976 Law Enforcement Assistance Administration survey established support for department-sponsored physical fitness programs (see McNickle 1996). Specifically, this project surveyed approximately 2,000 sworn officers, 90 percent of whom

were in favor of such a program. However, McNickle reported that of the responding agencies, a department-sponsored program was employed by only 14 agencies. Ness and Light (1992) reported the results of a 1986 FBI survey initiated to assess future training needs of 2,497 police agencies nationwide. Their survey indicated that managing personal stress and maintaining proper physical condition were the two most requested programs among responding agencies.

The purpose of this bulletin is to identify current trends and activities regarding post-academy physical fitness programming among Texas law enforcement agencies. Specifically, this effort addresses post-recruit physical fitness initiatives found within a stratified random sample of municipal police agencies and sheriffs' departments throughout Texas. A survey instrument was distributed to select Texas law enforcement agencies to identify characteristics of law enforcement physical fitness programs for incumbent personnel.

The Survey

The survey instrument consisted of 28 multiple choice and six short answer questions divided into four sections. This month's bulletin will address sections one and two. Section one was designed to examine the nature (types of programs and incentives) and level of participation involved in a fitness program (whether mandatory or voluntary). There was also an attempt to determine the most significant reasons Texas law enforcement administrators had for initiating fitness programs and if they had been properly validated. Section two examined the availability of on-site fitness equipment and facilities, as well as on-site lifestyle change programs.

Results

The sample was composed of 63 randomly selected municipal police and sheriffs' departments. The majority (79%) consisted of municipal police agencies, sheriffs' departments accounted for 16 percent of the sample, and the remaining 5 percent did not indicate their demographic information.

Post-Academy physical fitness training. Police work has been characterized in contrasting ways. Because much of an officer's time is spent sitting or standing, several researchers refer to law enforcement as a sedentary profession (Arters and Aaron 1989; International Association of Chiefs of Police 1979; Kuntz 1989; Reintzell 1990). Despite these long periods of inactivity, sworn personnel may be required to react immediately in emergency situations.

Only a small percentage of respondents (36.5%) participate in *any* form of departmental fitness training (n=23), and only three departments (4.8%) met the requirements of a mandatory physical fitness program (see Figure 1). Based upon this information, criteria were developed to identify those departments that meet the standards of a true mandatory fitness program: (a) all sworn personnel, regardless of rank, current duty assignment or age are required to participate in the fitness program; (b) all must participate in routine fitness testing; (c) the agency has validated that physical fitness is job-related; (d) the agency has included key phrases linking police tasks to physical fitness in its job description; and (e) the agency has provided fitness instruction by a certified fitness trainer. Originally eight respondents indicated that their department had a mandatory post-academy physical fitness program; however, only three agencies actually met the criteria. It would appear that 63.5 percent of the sample are not formally engaging in activities which would ensure that sworn personnel are in proper physical condition. Because mandatory departmental physical fitness programs have only been implemented by a few law enforcement agencies (n=3), police officers may not be achieving the benefits of routine physical activity.

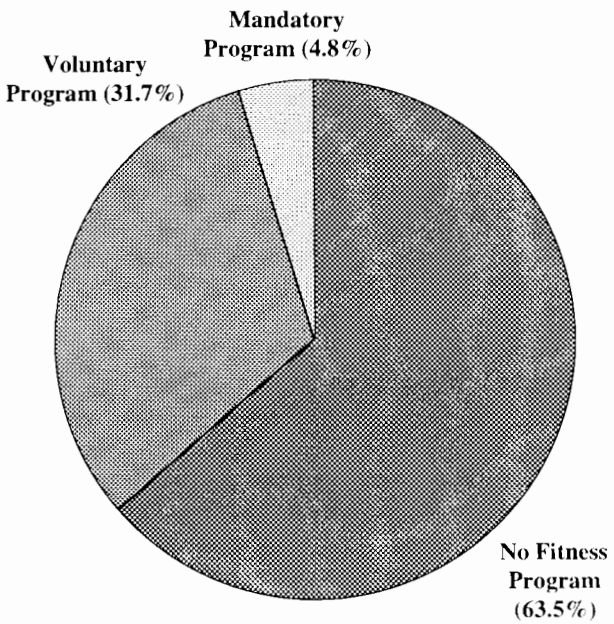

Figure 1

Prevalence of Post-Academy Physical Fitness Programs by Type

Justification for fitness program. Respondents identifying the presence of a post-academy physical fitness program were asked to rank, in order of importance, the most significant reasons for establishing their training program. Table 1 reveals that improving officer health or reducing the risk of disease was the most significant factor associated with

program initiation, followed by helping officers perform essential job functions. Two other closely ranked factors include alleviating occupational stress and improving one's overall quality of life. Reducing agency health care expenditures and reducing weight or increasing lean muscle mass were ranked fifth and sixth, respectively. The factor reported to be least significant to program initiation was reducing potential departmental liability.

Table 1

Aggregate Scores and Rank of Factors Associated with Program Initiation

Contributing Factors	Aggregate Score	Rank
Improve Health/Reduce Risk of Disease	8.8	1
Help Officers Perform Essential Police Tasks	12.0	2
Improve Overall Quality of Life	13.0	3
Alleviate Occupational Stress	13.0	3
Reduce Agency's Health Care Costs	15.6	5
Reduce Weight/Increase Lean Muscle Mass	17.8	6
Reduce Potential Departmental Liability	25.8	7

Respondents were also provided an opportunity to describe any significant administrative changes that had affected fitness program initiation. Seven of the 23 agencies with departmental physical fitness programming responded, with five referring to acquiring new police leadership as the most significant administrative changes, and two describing city administration, specifically, the city manager, as the most significant organizational change that affected program initiation.

Departmental incentives. The survey indicated that 19 (30.2%) of the 63 surveyed agencies provided some type of incentive to ensure or to increase fitness program participation (see Table 2). The most common incentive was the provision of a tee-shirt or ribbon designed to distinguish program participants from non-participants (n=8). Additionally, no agency participating in this study offered pay bonuses to fitness program participants. Jones (1992) suggests that "departments contemplating mandatory physical fitness standards should seriously consider allowing on-duty workout time before the consequences of the program take effect" (p. 9).

Program Components

For an adequate fitness program to exist, law enforcement agencies should incorporate certain program components into on-going departmental fitness training (Charles, 1983; Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research 1996; Collingwood 1996, 1988a; Jones 1992; Rizenman 1988). Physical fitness training for incumbent officers should include: (a) medical/health screening; (b) periodic fitness assessments; (c) wellness education/training, such as stress management or nutritional counseling (Arters and Aaron 1989; Schofield 1989), and (d) personalized exercise prescriptions (Arters and Aaron 1989; Bahrke and Olin 1981; Charles 1983). The questionnaire examined whether each of these program components were in place among the surveyed police organizations. Only the three agencies identified as having mandatory fitness programs utilized each of these fitness program components.

Health screening. Health screening was the most commonly identified fitness program component within those agencies with on-going fitness training (see Table 3). Of the 23 agencies with on-going fitness training, 13 (56.5%) incorporate health risk appraisals into departmental fitness training.

Table 2

Summary of Departmental Incentives

Type of Incentive	f	Mandatory n=3	Voluntary n=20	% of Sample
Percent of Departmental Incentives	19	3	16	30.2
Tee-shirt/Ribbon	8	1	7	12.7
Free/Reduced Cost Gym Membership	7	0	7	11.1
On-duty Workout Time	7	3	4	11.1
Free Fitness Equipment	2	1	1	3.2
Pay Bonuses	0	0	0	0

Routine physical fitness assessment. In addition to health screening, comprehensive physical fitness programming must include periodic fitness testing (Arters and Aaron 1989; Charles 1983; Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research 1996; Collingwood 1995; Jones 1992). Although the present survey revealed that periodic fitness testing was the second most common program element, only 12 (19.1%) of the 63 agencies reported routine fitness assessments. Lack of periodic fitness testing, as indicated by the survey, may lead to job-related injuries (Hoffman 1993; Nichols 1994) (Table 3).

Wellness/Health education. Another program element examined was the availability of wellness education. Arters and Aaron (1989) suggest that health education is the most important component and explain that classroom instruction geared toward changing attitudes and perceptions regarding exercise is absolutely vital for formal fitness training. Despite the importance, only 11 agencies (17.5%) indicated the availability of health and fitness education. Hockey (1993) asserts that those who are well-informed about exercise and nutrition tend to be more physically active than those who are not (Table 3).

Individualized exercise programming. Law enforcement officers often engage in poor lifestyle habits which may have serious negative implications (Colligon et al. 1995; Kuntz 1988; Wood et al. 1982). Intensity, frequency, and duration will vary depending upon the existing health and physical fitness status of each program participant (Charles 1983). Thus, generic exercise programming may not be the most effective approach. The current study found that only nine departments (14.3%) had personalized exercise programming (Table 3).

The literature reveals that medical screening, individualized exercise prescription, wellness training, and periodic fitness testing can each provide important health and fitness benefits for both the officer and the organization. Unfortunately, the present study found that few departments comply with the existing recommendations in physical fitness programming.

Consequences

Many researchers state that even though physical fitness programs have been a rarity among law enforcement agencies, mandatory fitness standards are receiving greater attention (Collingwood 1988a; Hoffman 1993; McNickle 1996; Ness and Light 1992). This study found those departments with mandatory fitness programs (n=3) utilized progressive sanctions for failure to meet fitness standards. Respondents reported that officers were given several opportunities to achieve adequate levels of physical fitness before disciplinary actions were pursued. It is important to note that each of these departments recognized and emphasized the importance of positive motivation over punitive sanctions.

On-Site Fitness Facilities/Exercise Resources

Fitness facilities. Past research indicates that, in addition to various program components, exercise resources must be provided to fitness program participants (Arters and Aaron 1989; Charles 1983; Jones 1992; McNeill and Prentice; Rizenman 1988). The present study found that only 18 departments (28.6%) make such facilities immediately available to sworn personnel (see Table 4). The two most popular fitness facilities were a weight room and a locker room. Although other fitness facilities were made available by responding agencies, these resources were far less common. It is possible that financial limitations as well as inadequate space prevent law enforcement administrators from providing training facilities such as an aerobics room, a gymnasium, or an outdoor training site. This bulletin found that four agencies without readily accessible fitness facilities

Table 3

Summary of Program Components

Program Elements	f	Mandatory n=3	Voluntary n=20	% with Program	% of Sample
Health Screening	13	3	10	56.5	20.6
Periodic Fitness Assessments	12	3	9	52.2	19.1
Education of Fitness Concepts	11	0	8	47.8	17.5
Individual Exercise	9	3	6	39.1	14.3
Personalized Exercise Prescriptions	0	0	0	0	0
Agencies without Program	40	-	-	-	63.5

Table 4

Summary of On-Site Fitness Facilities

Facility Type	f	Mandatory n=3	Voluntary n=20	% with Program	% of Sample
Presence of Facilities	18	3	15	78.3	28.6
Weight Room	17	3	14	73.9	27.0
Locker Room	15	3	12	65.2	23.8
Aerobics Room	3	0	3	13.1	4.8
Gymnasium	3	1	2	13.1	4.8
Outdoor Training Site	2	0	2	8.7	3.2
Running Track	2	0	2	8.7	3.2
Racquetball Court	1	0	1	4.4	1.6

utilized local, outside sources (e.g., YMCA, community college, etc.) to encourage or to increase fitness program participation.

Those respondents who indicated the presence of on-site facilities were also asked to characterize the type of accessibility granted to sworn personnel. Table 5 demonstrates that of the 23 agencies with a post-academy fitness program, 17 departments (73.9%) provided 24-hour access to departmental facilities, one agency (4.3%) allowed officers to access on-site facilities only before or after their shift, and the remaining five agencies (21.7%) did not have on-site facilities.

Table 5 also reveals the types of groups permitted to utilize such facilities. For example, outside law enforcement personnel were granted access by 12 agencies (52.2%), seven departments (30.4%) permitted an officer's immediate family members to use on-site facilities, three agencies (13.1%) allowed an officer to bring in relatives, and two departments (8.7%) permitted an officer's friend(s) to use departmental facilities.

Exercise equipment. The present study also examined the types of exercise equipment made available to law enforcement personnel (see Table 6). Results reveal that only 17 agencies (27%) made exercise resources available to sworn personnel. Due to the construction of the survey, however, only those agencies with on-going fitness training programs were asked to indicate whether departmental exercise equipment was made available. Nine of the 17 departments that provided exercise equipment have at least some of the following pieces: free weights, stationary bicycle, multi- and single-station weight machine, a treadmill, and a stairclimber. However, a majority of the responding agencies (n=45) did not have a fitness facility and thus had no exercise equipment.

Lifestyle Change Programs

Literature suggests that law enforcement personnel engage in poor lifestyle habits, such as smoking, drinking, and overeating (Bahrke and Olin 1981; Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research 1996; Colligon et al. 1995; Fraser 1986;

Table 5

Frequency of Accessibility to Departmental Fitness Facilities

Facility Type	f	Mandatory n=3	Voluntary n=20	% with Program	% of Sample
24-Hour	17	3	14	73.9	27.0
Outside Law Enforcement Agencies	12	3	9	52.2	19.1
Immediate Family	7	2	5	30.4	11.1
Relatives	3	1	2	13.1	4.8
Friends	2	1	1	8.7	3.2
Before/After Shift	1	0	1	4.3	1.6
Agencies without on-site Facilities	5	0	5	21.7	7.9

Table 6

Summary of On-Site Exercise Equipment

Exercise Equipment	f	Mandatory n=3	Voluntary n=20	% with Program	% of Sample
Presence of Equipment	17	3	14	73.9	27.0
Free Weights	15	3	12	65.2	23.8
Stationary Bicycle	13	3	10	56.5	20.6
Multi-station Weight Machine	11	1	10	47.8	17.5
Single-station Weight Machine	10	2	8	8.7	3.2
Treadmill	10	3	7	43.5	15.9
Stairclimber	9	3	6	39.1	14.3
Jump Ropes	6	2	4	26.1	9.5
Heavy Bag	5	2	3	21.7	7.9
Nordic Track	3	1	2	13.1	3.2
Rowing Machine	2	1	1	13.1	3.2

Quire and Blount 1990). The survey found that few departments offer lifestyle change programs, and only 15 agencies (23.8%) had initiated any form of wellness training. More specifically, this study examined the prevalence of seven different lifestyle change programs. Of those departments that indicated the availability of wellness training (n=15), general health education was the most frequently selected response (see Table 7). Eleven departments (17.5%) reported the utilization of health education. However, it is unclear as to what type of education was offered, and some departments may simply distribute brochures describing general health information.

Despite the alarming suicide rates among law enforcement officers, suicide prevention was the lifestyle change program identified as being least offered by participating agencies, with only three departments (4.8%) indicating this type of education. It should be noted that none of the mandated fitness programs offered such instruction.

In addition to the high rates of suicide, law enforcement personnel may experience other consequences of occupational stress such as marital discord, substance abuse and strained peer relations (Anderson et al. 1995; Ayres 1990; Johnson 1995). Only eight agencies (12.7%), however, reported the availability of stress management. Also, less than 15 percent of responding agencies provided substance abuse counseling, stress management, nutritional counseling, weight management, smoking cessation, or suicide prevention.

Next month's bulletin will address sections three and four of the survey questionnaire. Specifically, section three will characterize the type of leadership responsible for post-recruit training programs among Texas law enforcement agencies, and section four will explore the nature of fitness standards currently in place among sampled law enforcement agencies. Whether agencies had implemented a truly mandatory post-academy physical fitness program and reasons for non-implementation will also be examined.

Table 7

Summary of Lifestyle Change Programs

Program Type	f	Mandatory n=3	Voluntary n=20	% with Program	% of Sample
Presence of Instruction	15	3	12	65.2	23.8
Health Education	11	3	8	47.8	17.5
Substance Abuse Counseling	9	1	8	39.1	14.3
Multi-station Stress Management	8	1	7	34.8	12.7
Nutritional Counseling	7	1	6	30.4	11.1
Weight Management	6	1	5	26.1	9.5
Smoking Cessation	4	1	3	17.4	6.3
Suicide Prevention	3	0	3	13.0	4.8

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