

Physical Fitness Testing for the Altamonte Springs Police Department

Brian Foley

Abstract

The Altamonte Springs Police Department has utilized a physical fitness test based on Cooper Standards for over thirty years. The combination of the Cooper Institute no longer certifying law enforcement trainers and the need for a validated physical fitness test creates a significant challenge for the Altamonte Springs Police Department. The purpose of this paper is to provide evidence-based research as to why physical fitness testing is important for law enforcement, what should be considered in the selection of a physical fitness test and the best options available for future physical fitness tests. To provide answers data was collected from a literature review, a survey on physical fitness testing was sent to 164 accredited law enforcement agencies in the state of Florida and several interviews conducted with subject matter experts on the topic of physical fitness testing and law enforcement.

Introduction

Law enforcement places both physical and emotional stressors on those who participate in the profession and the overall health of an officer can be directly related to their level of physical fitness. This means the men and women responsible for the protection of others should also protect themselves when it comes to their physical activity and physical fitness levels. For this reason, officers as well as their organizations need to ensure physical fitness is not only addressed, but also promoted. The Altamonte Springs Police Department recognizes the importance of this concept and the importance of officers being physically fit. The Altamonte Springs Police Department encourages officers to participate in physical activity.

Evidence of the agencies commitment to physical fitness can be found in the Altamonte Springs Police Department's Wellness Program. The Altamonte Springs Police Department developed and put into place a Wellness Program policy and procedure in 1987. The Wellness Program was created utilizing the Cooper Institute standardized norms. The Cooper Institute and their standardized norms will be explained in detail later in this report. The thirty plus years of dedication to physical fitness and wellness by the Altamonte Springs Police Department have resulted in tradition that forms a sense of agency pride. The Wellness Program was created with an emphasis placed on officer's overall health. Participation in the Wellness Program is meant to reduce emotional and nervous tension, reduce injuries, reduce recovery time needed for injuries, decrease the effects of diseases and orthopedic disorders as well as improve the ability for officers to perform their duties and responsibilities without utilizing paid leave time (ASPD, 1987).

The Wellness Program states officers will participate in semi-annual assessments, every April and October of each year. The assessment is a 2 part process, known as levels. Level 1 is a fitness screening that consists of a resting heart rate and blood pressure measurement, body composition/body fat percentage and also body weight (ASPD, 1987). Level 2, known as the maximum exercise assessment consists of cardio-respiratory endurance (1.5 mile run or 1 mile walk), upper body absolute strength (bench press), lower body absolute strength (leg press), muscular endurance (sit-ups) and flexibility (sit & reach) (ASPD,1987). Combined scores from each category are totaled to give an overall assessment score.

Wellness scores calculated from the assessments play a role into employee performance appraisals, merit raises, the promotional process and officers failing to be in compliance with wellness standards may even be disciplined. Wellness incentive awards are also offered with a day off with pay being awarded to anyone that achieves an overall rating between 75% and 84% and two days off with pay being awarded to anyone that achieves an overall rating between 85% and 99%. To help officers maintain and meet department standards, officers are allowed to work out while on duty for 2 hours in the Altamonte Springs Police Department's 2000 square foot workout facility.

The concern for the Altamonte Springs Police Department and the purpose for this research paper is that the Cooper Institute has decided to refocus their attention on medical care and scientific studies. As a result, the Cooper Institute has made the decision to conclude their personal trainer certification program and they no longer certify or re-certify personal trainers. This means that as the current trainers retire the Altamonte Springs Police Department will be absent certified trainers to administer the Wellness Program. Therefore, an alternative physical fitness test for the agency will need to be created or adopted.

Literature Review

Research was conducted in order to find the best option available to the Altamonte Springs Police Department for replacing the current Wellness Program or physical abilities test based on Cooper Institute standards. The research identified 3 key areas of consideration that should be taken into account for replacing the Wellness Program. The 3 key areas are importance, validation and the current testing process. Importance focuses on why a physical ability test is necessary for an organization to conduct. Validation explains the potential legal issues an organization needs to look out for and avoid. The current testing process examines the physical ability test created by the Cooper Institute and what went into its development. Each of these 3 areas have their own unique issues and challenges associated with them (Lagestad, 2012).

Importance:

It seems like an obvious statement to make that physical fitness is important for law enforcement professionals. However, when challenged to support this statement with research, science or any other form of evidence the answers are not as obvious. So, the question becomes is physical fitness really all that important for police officers. This

question becomes complex based on the truth that most of what police officers do throughout their career does not require a high level of physical fitness. Speaking with and interacting with citizens, working on a computer and driving a vehicle are all low on physical activity levels. Of course, there are the clear incidents in a police officer's career where the ability to run, jump, climb, crawl and utilize defensive tactics is important, but for the most part police work is low in physical activity. This does not mean physical fitness is unimportant to police officers and actually brings up the interesting fact that due to police officers engaging in long periods of time during their shift with activities like riding in a car or working at a desk, it means that they are more in need of the benefits that physical exercise can provide. Especially, given the fact that without warning their duties can turn into life and death physical confrontation (Lagestad, 2012).

Understanding physical fitness is important to police officers raises the question of should an organization test physical fitness levels and if so what type of test should an organization use. If an organization is going to test physical fitness abilities the tests should not just rely on strength as a measurement. Research shows that a general level of fitness, which lowers the possibility of injury or sickness is more important than physical strength (Lagestad, 2012). Research has also shown that the most important physical skills for police officers are stamina and endurance (Lagestad, 2012). The goal should be lifelong wellness that allows officers to perform their duties in good health for the longevity of their career through each officers own genetic potential (Lagestad, 2012). This means that wellness is important not just from a physical skills perspective, but also from a health perspective and a psychological perspective (Lagestad, 2012). Physical skills are important to police officers based on the fact that despite a low frequency of use, the potential for police officers to use physical force will always exist (Lagestad, 2012). A health perspective is important based on the fact that research has shown a clear link between inactivity and poor health (Lagestad, 2012). This means that wellness programs are important for officers to combat the negative health effects of shift work and long periods of inactivity. A psychological perspective is important for officers based on the mental confidence it can provide. Police officers make important decisions that affect the lives of many individuals and it is important to make these decisions with confidence. Research on physical fitness has found a positive link to an individuals perceived physical fitness and the level of competence they have in themselves (Lagestad, 2012).

Validation:

Development of a physical fitness abilities test must take into account the ability for it to be valid and defensible. Legal issues concerning physical ability tests relate to both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1991 and also the Americans with Disabilities Act (Cooper, 2014). Physical ability tests need to meet the criteria of being job related and scientifically valid (Cooper, 2014). A key issue involving the development of any physical ability test is validation. Proper validation of a physical abilities test can mean the difference between being successful or unsuccessful at defending against discrimination law suits and the avoidance of issues brought about by adverse impact. Adverse impact occurs when standards appear to be fair, but in fact lead to the discrimination of a protected group (Hoover, 1992). Law enforcement organizations must take every precaution to avoid adverse impact in not only testing, but also in areas of performance

appraisals, hiring, discipline and promotions. When it comes to physical ability tests race is not usually associated with adverse impact. However, the protected group of females can be impacted negatively in physical ability tests and therefore law enforcement organizations must avoid doing so (Hoover, 1992).

Everyone must be given a fair opportunity to successfully complete a physical abilities test. However, at the same time it is not unreasonable to say a person's physical agility and stamina relate to on-the-job functions of law enforcement officers. Physical fitness ability testing is important in the selection of not only the individuals capable of performing the duties of a police officer, but they are also important for identifying who is not capable of performing the duties of a police officer. In fact, law enforcement organizations could be held liable if they hire and train individuals that possess below average strength and ability (Bissett, Bissett & Snell, 2012). The reason this is important is due to the fact that an officer possessing below average strength and ability may use more force than is reasonably necessary to counter a subject's level of resistance. This means the below average officer will be inclined to use excessive force in order to compensate for a lack of ability and confidence. Simply stated, Physical fitness is important to police officers. The problem is that making this statement and developing a physical ability standard requires a "leap of faith" that physical fitness actually relates to a law enforcement officer's duties (Hoover, 1992).

There is a considerable challenge between taking this leap of faith that physical fitness plays a role into an officer's performance of their duties and developing a practical and fair physical ability test. It is not possible for an organization to create a testing standard that replicates the stress officers undergo while responding to priority calls or the physical demands of responding to a subject's level of resistance. An organization also can't just arbitrarily select exercises and a number of repetitions for evaluation. There must be a correlation between the actual duties of an officer and a physical ability test that is used by an organization (Hoover, 1992). To find this correlation, researchers have developed three different types of physical ability tests known as job simulation, physical agility and physical fitness. Each of these three types of physical ability tests have their own unique set of pros and cons. All three have successfully been defended in court and at the same time when not practiced properly each has been determined by a court to be invalid. Taking a look at each of them further helps understand their strengths and weaknesses as well as how each relates to validation (Hoover, 1992).

Job simulation tests can measure physical agility or stamina by as closely as possible replicating on-the-job tasks (Hoover, 1992). Based on practicality and safety concerns, creating a job simulation test for the position of a police officer is much more difficult than it is for other professions. Another issue in creating a job simulation test for police officers is the establishment of a standard of performance (Hoover, 1992). An example of this is police officers are expected to be able to chase suspects on foot. Measurement of this task seems simple at first by stating an officer should cover a determined amount of distance in a determined amount of time. However, there is no guideline for establishing the distance and time to replicate a foot chase and be fairly conducted (Hoover, 1992).

Physical agility tests refer to a set of exercises intended to measure physical strength and stamina (Hoover, 1992). A benefit to physical agility tests is that they are less expensive and safer to administer when compared to job simulation tests.

An example of physical agility tests is the measurement of upper body strength by push-ups, stamina by running, agility by a balance walk and core strength by sit-ups. All of these exercises together give a reasonable measurement of physical fitness. The issue associated with physical agility tests is that research has shown that there is no relationship between measures of physical condition to the tasks actually performed by police in the course of their duties (Hoover, 1992). Another issue is establishing “cutoff” scores to be utilized. The number of sit-ups performed in a minute can illustrate the difficulty of establishing cutoff scores. If the cutoff score for sit-ups is 30 in a minute and someone is only able to complete 29 in a minute, it may not really mean they are not capable of performing the duties of a police officer (Hoover, 1992).

Physical fitness abilities tests conduct a series of tests measuring 5 elements of physical fitness by testing a large number of people broken into categories of sex and age (Hoover, 1992). The Cooper standards are an example of physical fitness ability tests. Physical fitness ability tests are similar to physical agility tests, but are different in the fact that by utilizing a large sample size “norms” are able to be developed (Hoover, 1992). The Altamonte Springs Police Department and other organizations refer to these norms as “wellness indicators”. The norms create a standard and breaking the standard down into categories related to age and sex allows for performance levels to be established. The benefit to using a physical fitness abilities test by organizations is that adverse impact is eliminated due to the fact that the norms are created by age and gender and individuals are only compared to others in their specific group (Hoover, 1992).

Current testing process:

An examination of the Cooper Institute provides an explanation as to why the Altamonte Springs Police Department currently utilizes its standards and insight into what will be required for a replacement program. The Cooper Institute provides health and fitness certification for law enforcement professionals and organizations. Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper started the 501(c)(3) Cooper Institute in 1970 to research and collect data on fitness (Cooper, 2014). The Cooper Institute conducts classes at their Cooper Aerobics Center in Dallas, Texas. At the Cooper Aerobics Institute students attend a 5 day course program, which exposes them to lectures, demonstrations of techniques, participation in practical sessions and supervised practice in measurement assessments (Cooper, 2014). To earn certification from the Cooper Institute students must successfully complete both a written and a practical exam (Cooper, 2014).

The Cooper Institute believes physical fitness is important to first responders because it is not only the ability to carry out daily tasks with vigor and alertness without fatigue or the loss of energy to engage in leisure time pursuits, but it is also the ability to meet the above average physical stresses that are encountered in emergency circumstances (Cooper, 2014). This means that since police officers may respond to an emergency incident without notice, police officers need to maintain physical fitness to be properly prepared to respond to emergency incidents when they occur. The ability to perform certain physical fitness tasks without issue is important. The theory is that just because something does not occur often, does not mean it is not important. The important job-related physical tasks for law enforcement are walking, running short and moderate distances, forcible entry, climbing stairs, dodging obstacles, crawling, jumping,

carrying, dragging, pushing, pulling, utilizing restraint devices and short to moderate duration of using force (Cooper, 2014). Dr. Cooper refers to the condition of being capable to perform these tasks at a moment's notice as "readiness to perform the emergency function" (Cooper, 2014). This means that physical fitness is in fact a necessary job-related task of police officers and the development of a physical abilities test was necessary (Cooper, 2014).

To create a valid and scientific physical abilities test the Cooper Institute utilized the research they have collected since 1971 on over 110,000 patients (Cooper, 2014). The patients underwent a series of different examinations and exercises. This allowed Dr. Cooper to develop the best series of exercises or battery for a complete physical abilities test. When the Cooper Institute originally created a physical ability test, 5 fitness norms were utilized for the test battery. The norms that were used are cardiovascular/1.5 mile run, body fat/skin calp, flexibility/sit and reach, core strength/sit-ups and relative strength/bench press. These are the same 5 norms along with the addition of a leg press that the Altamonte Springs Police Department currently utilizes as a physical ability test. However, the test battery has gone through some changes over the years. The Cooper Institute now recommends a test battery for law enforcement should be comprised of a vertical jump, bench press, sit-ups, 300 meter sprint, push-ups and a 1.5 mile run (Cooper, 2014). This means that even if the Altamonte Springs Police Department is able to keep the Cooper standards as a physical ability test a modification of which fitness test battery is used may need to be made (Cooper, 2014).

Methods

The purpose of this research was to gather information from law enforcement organizations on the utilization of physical fitness testing. Data was collected through both surveys and interviews. In an effort to achieve a high degree of thoroughness data was collected from local, state and federal law enforcement organizations.

Surveys were conducted by contacting a sampling of the training divisions from both large and small accredited agencies in all 7 regions of operation in the state of Florida, as well as the state agencies of the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). An emphasis was also placed on the surrounding jurisdictions of Altamonte Springs, with surveys given to every agency in Seminole county.

Survey questions were created to elicit responses regarding if an agency utilizes physical fitness testing, how the tests were developed, what methods of measurement are used and to what degree are the tests beneficial to the organization. Follow-up questions were utilized depending on an initial response to a question. The surveys also allowed respondents to provide additional information or comments through fill in the blank questions.

Interviews were also conducted with subject matter experts to provide further detail and insight, which could not be achieved through surveys. John VanVorst from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was selected to be interviewed based on the fact that the FBI is tasked with gathering physical fitness data from agencies across the country and he is responsible for developing and administering the physical fitness testing

program for the FBI. Patrick Walsh from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) was selected to be interviewed based on the fact that the FWC recently conducted a thorough physical fitness test search and validation process. Patrick Walsh was involved in every step of FWC's physical fitness validation process and was able to provide information on lessons learned throughout the process. Captain Jason Trumbower of the Florida State Police Department (FSUPD) was selected to be interviewed based on the fact that the FSUPD made the switch from using Cooper Standards to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Physical Abilities Test (PAT) and could provide detailed information on why his agency did so. Leah Fett from the American Council on Exercise (ACE) was also selected to be interviewed based on the fact that the Cooper Institute refers to ACE as their philosophical partners and endorses ACE as the organization assigned to continue Cooper Institute training certifications. All four of these interviews were beneficial to this paper based on the fact that the interview process allowed the experts to both elaborate on questions and more importantly provide information on questions that were not asked.

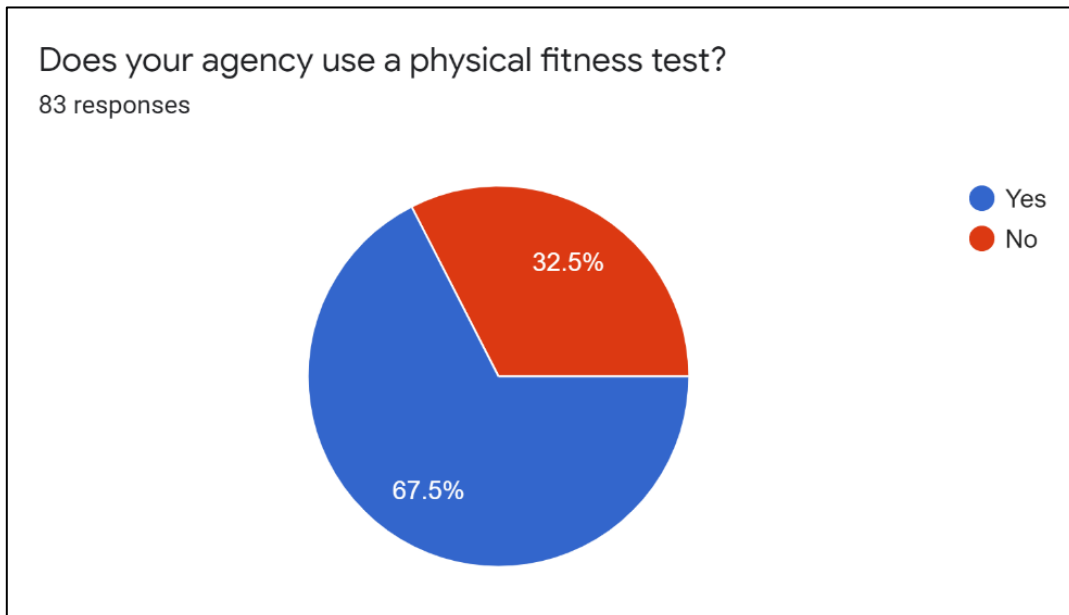
Results

Survey:

The survey was sent to 164 accredited law enforcement agencies in the state of Florida. A response from 83 agencies was received, for a response rate of 50.6%. Respondents did not answer every question, depending on the response to a question would dictate which question was prompted next for the person taking the survey.

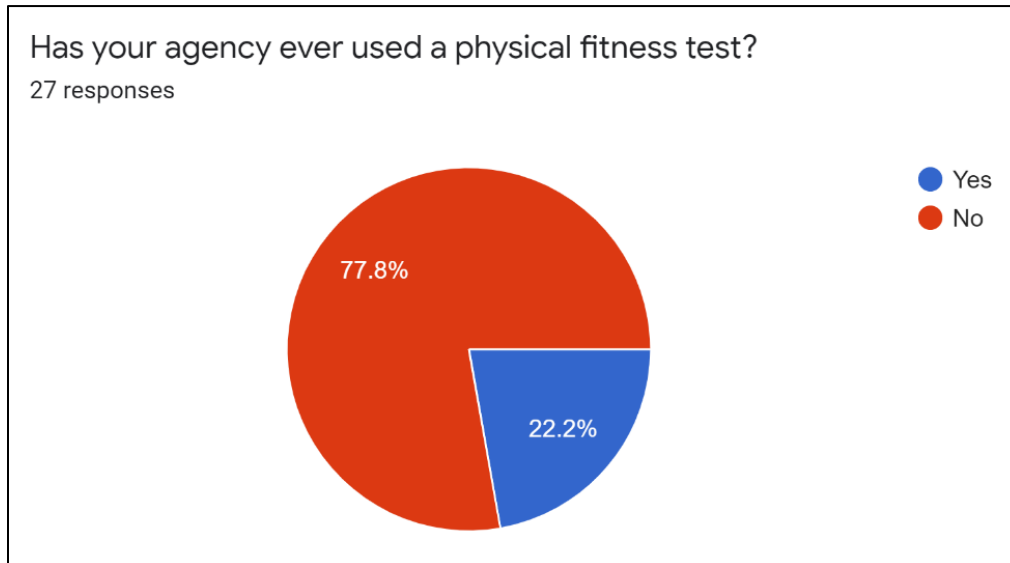
The first question simply asked respondents if their agency currently uses a physical fitness test. All 83 respondents answered this question. A total of 56 (67.5%) agencies currently utilize a physical fitness test. A total of 27 (32.5%) agencies do not currently utilize a physical fitness test.

TABLE 1: Agency Use of Fitness Test:



If respondents answered no to question 1 they were asked a follow up question inquiring if their agency has ever used a physical fitness test. Out of the 27 agencies that were not currently using a physical fitness test, 21 (77.8%) stated their agency has never used a physical fitness test. This means that 6 (22.2%) of the agencies used a physical fitness test in the past and for a number of reasons no longer do so.

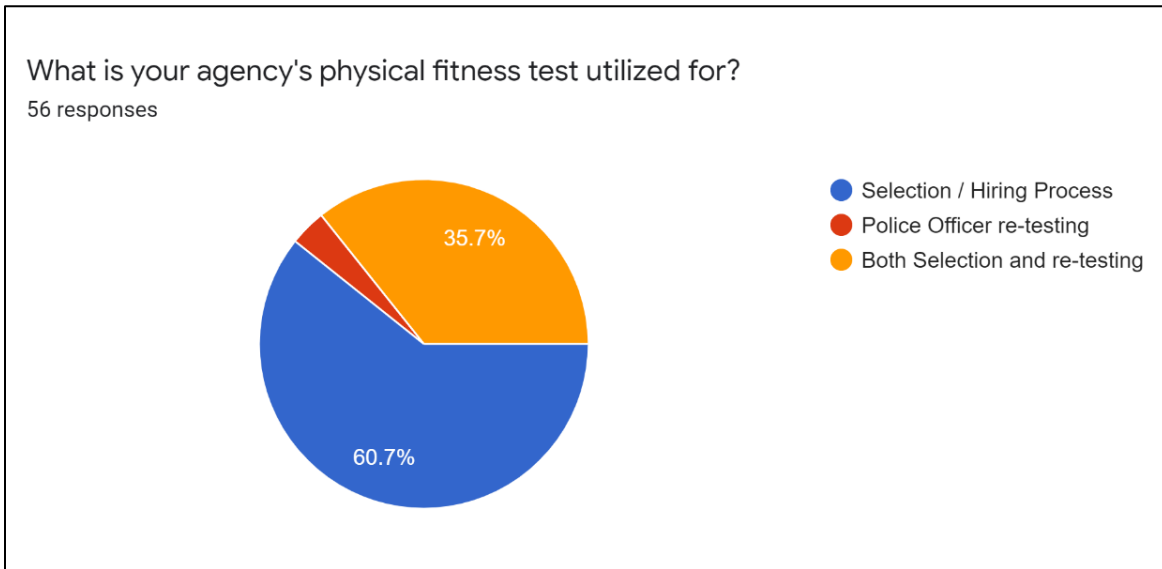
TABLE 2: History of Fitness Tests:



The 27 agencies that do not utilize a physical fitness test were asked to provide a reason why they do not currently use one or they have never used one in the past. Varying responses from 26 agencies were received. The responses ranged from contractual and union issues to injury risks and other unknown reasons. One agency (respondent) declined to answer the question.

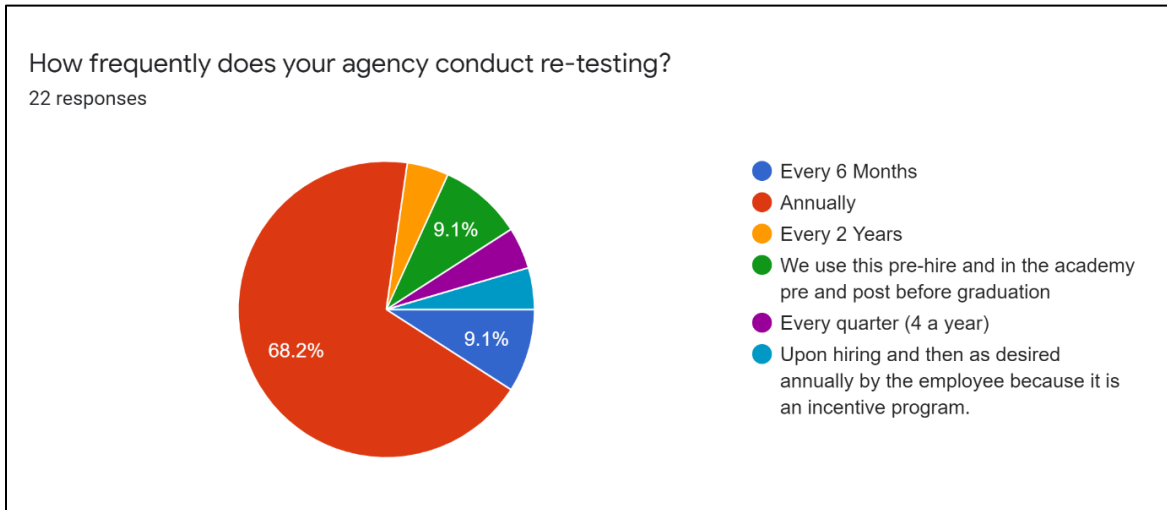
Out of the 56 respondents that replied their agency is currently utilizing a physical fitness test, they were given a follow up question regarding how their agency utilizes the test. A total of 34 (60.7%) respondents answered their agency only utilizes physical fitness testing for selection and the hiring process. While a total of 20 (35.7%) respondents stated their agencies utilize physical fitness testing for both selection / hiring process and officer re-testing. Only 2 (3.6%) of the respondents stated their agency only utilizes physical fitness testing for police officer re-testing.

TABLE 3: Reason Test is Administered:



Out of the 56 respondents that answered their agencies utilize physical fitness testing, 22 (39.3%) of them stated their agencies re-test officers. The 22 respondents stating their agencies utilized physical fitness testing to re-test officers were prompted to answer a follow up question on how frequently their agencies conduct re-testing. All 22 respondents provided an answer regarding frequency of re-testing. The most frequent answer was annually stated by 15 (69.2%) of the respondents. Some agencies responded that they utilize a physical fitness test at multiple stages in the hiring process. A total of 2 (9.1%) agencies utilize a physical fitness test while the applicant is in the academy and again for a second time once they graduate the academy. Also, 2 (9.1%) agencies replied they utilize a fitness test for the hiring process and then again as desired by the employee, since the results of the test are incentive based. While annually was by far the majority of the responses for the frequency a physical test is given there was also 1 (4.5%) response for every 2 years, 1 (4.5%) response for every 6 months and 1 (4.5%) response for quarterly (every 3 months).

TABLE 4: How Often the Test is Administered:



The 56 respondents that answered their agencies utilize physical fitness testing were asked to describe the type of test they use. The majority of respondents, 33 (58.9%) stated their agencies use the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Physical Abilities Test (PAT). Another 9 (16.1%) respondents stated their agencies use an obstacle course. This means that 75% of the responding agencies utilize either the FDLE PAT or an obstacle course for a physical fitness test. Cooper standards were currently being used by 2 (3.6%) of the respondents. The other 12 (21.4%) of the respondents described their agencies physical fitness tests as a combination of the FDLE PAT course, a series of exercises and obstacle courses.

TABLE 5-A: Type of Test Utilized:

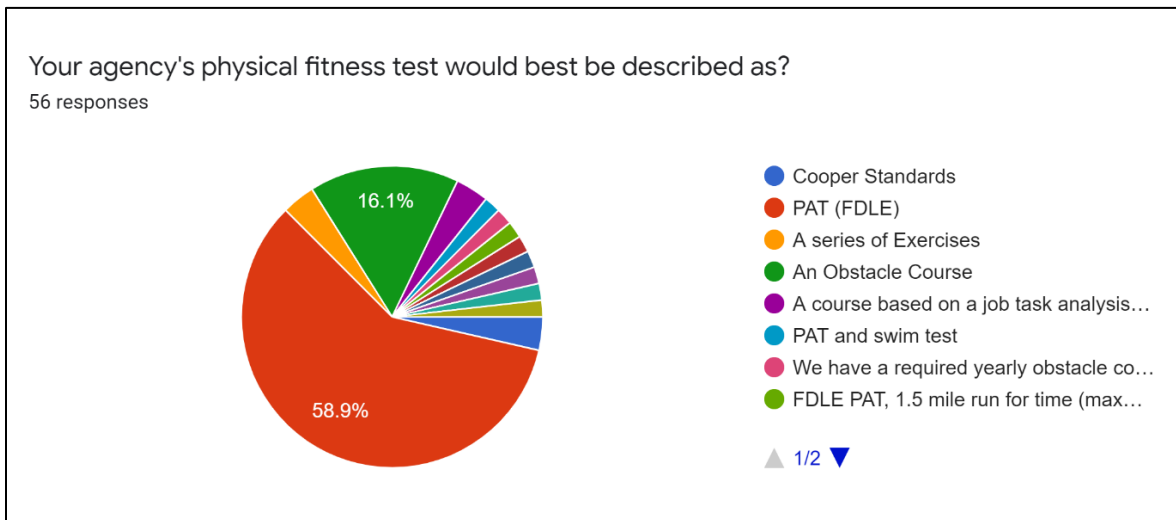
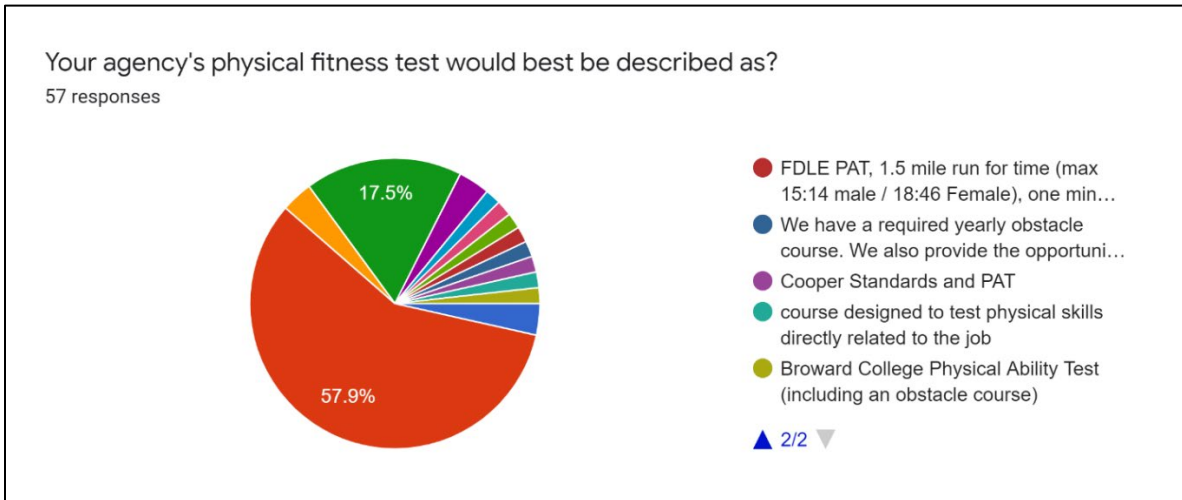
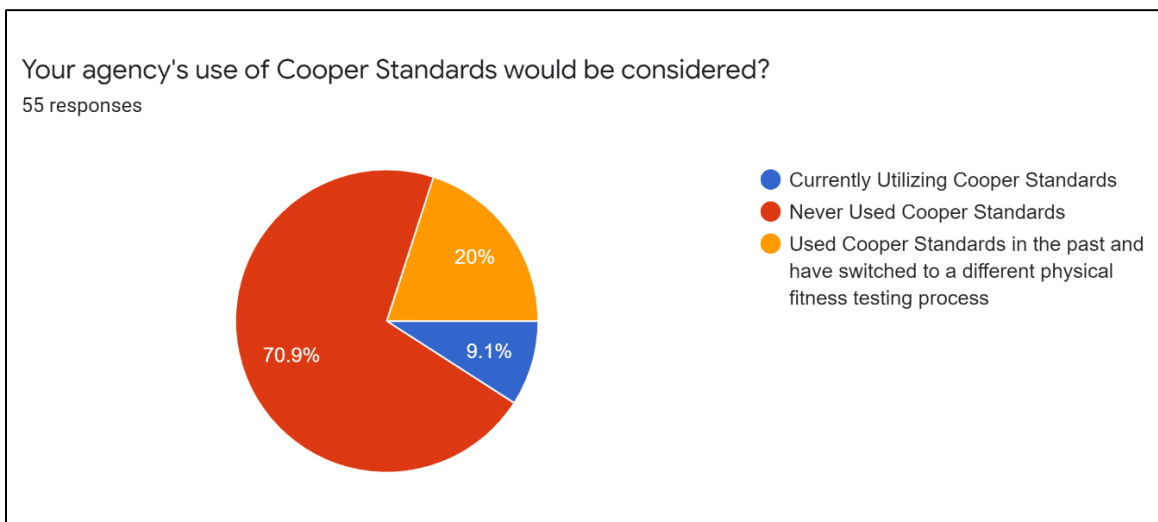


TABLE 5-B: Type of Test Utilized:



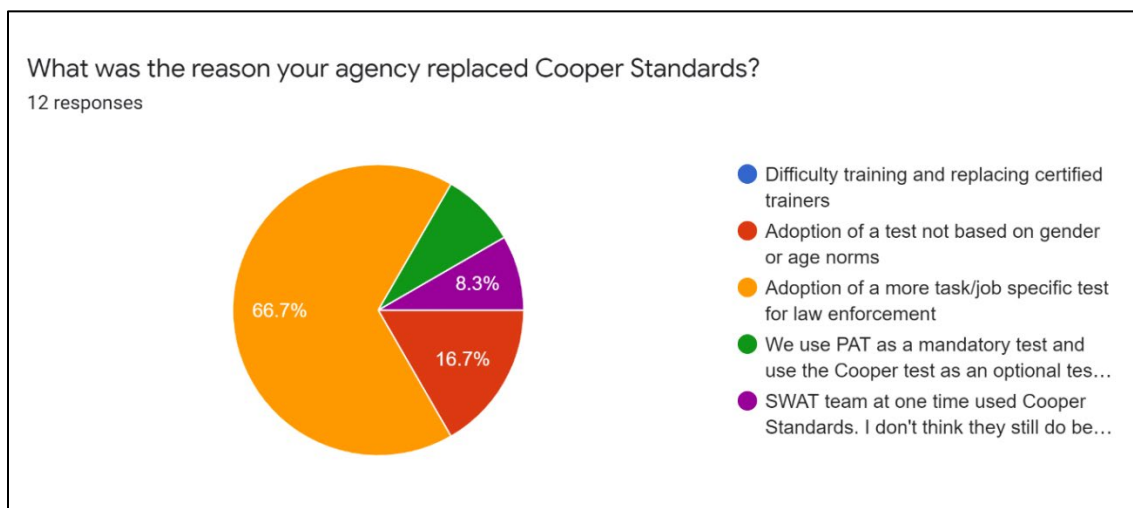
The 56 respondents that answered their agencies utilize physical fitness testing were asked to describe their agencies familiarization with Cooper Standards. A total of 39 (70.9%) of the respondents stated their agencies have never used Cooper Standards. Another 11 (20%) of the respondents stated their agencies used Cooper Standards in the past and have switched to a different physical fitness test. There were 5 (9.1%) of the agencies that stated they are still currently utilizing Cooper Standards. One respondent declined to answer the question.

TABLE 6: Familiarization with Cooper Standards:



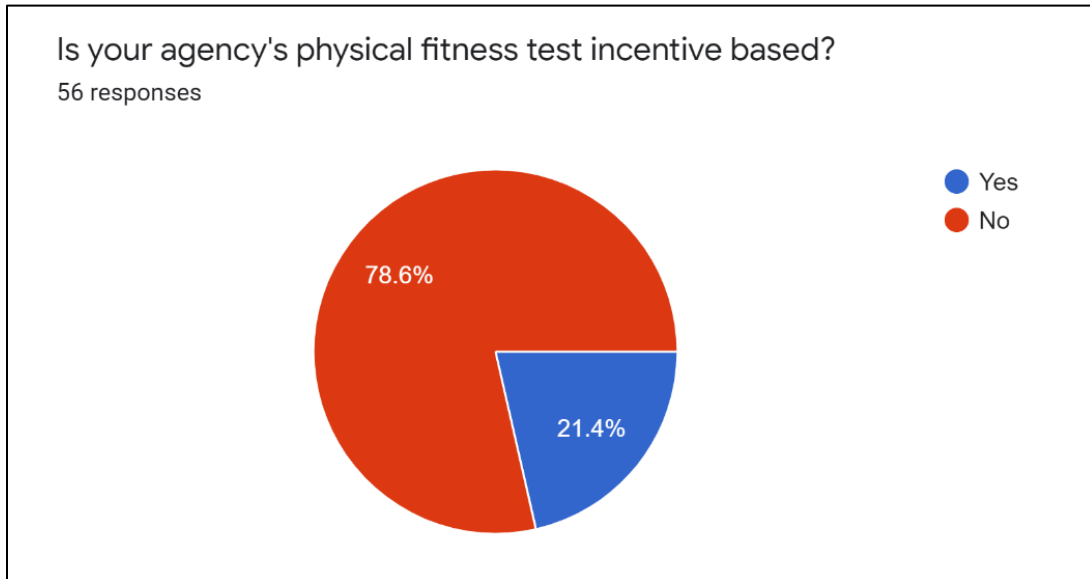
The agencies that used Cooper Standards in the past and have switched to a different form of physical fitness testing were asked why they made a choice to stop using Cooper Standards. A total of 12 respondents answered this question. Out of the 12 respondents a total of 8 (66.7%) stated their agencies reason for no longer using Cooper Standards was the adoption of a more job specific physical fitness test for law enforcement. A total of 2 (16.7%) respondents stated their agencies reason for switching from Cooper Standards was the adoption of a physical fitness test not based on age and gender norms. There was 1 (8.3%) agency that stated only their SWAT team used Cooper Standards in the past and 1 (8.3%) agency that stated they only used Cooper Standards for optional testing for employees.

TABLE 7: Reason for Switching from Cooper Standards:



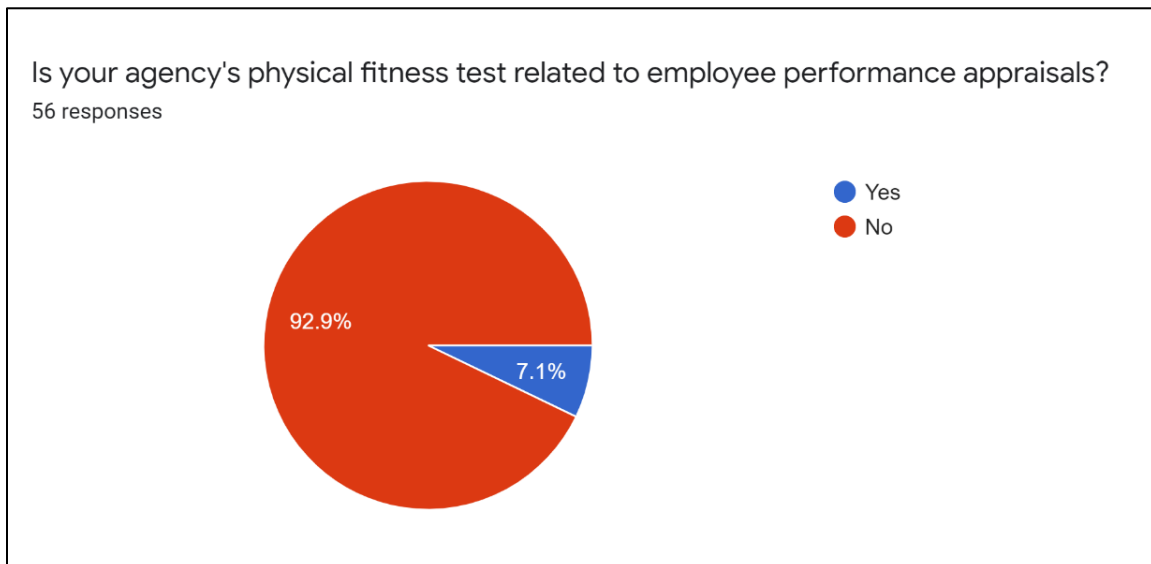
The 56 respondents that answered their agencies utilize physical fitness testing were asked if their agencies test was incentive based. A total of 44 (78.6%) of the respondents stated their agencies physical fitness test was not incentive based. This means a total of 12 (21.4%) of the respondents stated their agencies physical fitness test was incentive based.

TABLE 8: Incentive Based Physical Fitness Test:



The 56 respondents that answered their agencies utilize physical fitness testing were asked if their agencies test effected employee performance appraisals. A total of 52 (92.9%) of the respondents stated their agencies physical fitness test did not affect employee performance appraisals. A total of 4 (7.1%) of the respondents stated their agencies physical fitness test was related to employee performance appraisals.

TABLE 9: Physical Fitness Test Role in Performance Appraisals:



The last 3 questions of the survey were fill in the blank style, which allowed the respondents the ability to provide information that would not be possible through traditional multiple-choice questions. Respondents were asked to provide input on what was the most important factor that went into the selection of a physical fitness test for their agency. A total of 57 individual comments to this question were provided. The most common answers were legal validation, employee health and the ability to measure job specific abilities. Respondents were also asked to provide input on what was the least important factor that went into the selection of a physical fitness test for their agency. A total of 48 individual comments were provided. The most common answers were related to cost and pass/fail rates. The last question of the survey was open-ended to allow respondents an opportunity to provide input on any further information, comments or insight they may have towards the selection of a physical fitness test by an agency. A total of 67 responses were provided. The responses ranged from officer input, management support, ensuring fairness and making sure any test is job related.

Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with 4 separate subject matter experts. The experts to be interviewed were selected based on their individual knowledge of either Cooper Standards or their expertise in selecting a physical fitness test. Due to the experts residing in various parts of the country the interviews were conducted by phone.

John VanVorst of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) provided insight into what should be considered when developing a physical fitness test. VanVorst stated that any physical fitness test should be validated before being adopted by an agency. VanVorst also stressed the importance of a physical fitness test being able to measure a person's "physical infrastructure". VanVorst added that the number one thing a test should do is predict a person's ability to perform a job. According to VanVorst on top of predicting whether someone will or will not be successful performing a job, a test should also be helpful to employees. VanVorst believes a test should set goals and give a baseline for employees to maintain their health during employment and into retirement.

Patrick Walsh of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) provided information related to the FWC's process of creating a new physical fitness test. Walsh advised the FWC formed a committee that was tasked with creating a bid process for the creation of a validated physical fitness test. Walsh stated the committee was able to develop criteria for the test, seeking a job task analysis of physical fitness standards. Walsh advised Dr. Robert Moffatt's bid for \$60,000 was selected. Walsh stated what the committee liked about Dr. Moffatt's bid was the fact that he was local, out of Florida State University and the fact that he worked with the committee to ensure the test was "flexible and safe". Walsh advised during the development of their new physical fitness test, Dr. Moffatt made several visits to observe FWC officers in the field. Walsh added that Dr. Moffatt's observations were important to the creation of a physical fitness test that realistically measured what FWC officers will experience during the course of their duties.

Captain Jason Trumbower of the Florida State University Police Department provided information on why his agency made the change from Cooper Standards to the FDLE PAT test. Trumbower questioned the fairness of any test that based results on age or gender norms. Trumbower added that if everyone is expected to perform the same

job or tasks, then everyone should be measured the same way. For this reason, Trumbower was a big proponent of the FDLE PAT. Trumbower stated each officer must perform the same physical abilities in the same required amount of time. Trumbower further added that he also liked the fact that the FDLE PAT is based on what officers will experience while working, exiting a vehicle, running, jumping and reaching for equipment on their duty belt.

Leah Fett from the American Council on Exercise (ACE) provided information on ACE taking over the certification of trainers from the Cooper Institute. Fett did in fact confirm ACE certifies trainers and does so through a 16 week online course. However, Fett added that ACE has not taken over law enforcement certification responsibilities from the Cooper Institute and ACE does not have any plans to do so in the future. Fett further stated that ACE recommends law enforcement agencies contact the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) for any inquiries about law enforcement physical fitness or certification.

Discussion

Combining the information gathered from both the survey and the interviews conducted allowed for multiple points of views on physical fitness testing. The survey provided information on current physical fitness practices by law enforcement agencies. The interviews provided information on what subject matter experts believe should be considered by agencies in relation to physical fitness testing.

The survey revealed that a majority of law enforcement agencies, 56 (67.5%) out of the 83 responding agencies are currently utilizing a physical fitness test. Out of the agencies that currently use a physical fitness test, 96.4% use them during their hiring process. The combination of these 2 statistics reveals the fact that law enforcement agencies believe physical fitness is an important function of the profession and physical fitness levels should be considered when selecting candidates for hire.

While the survey revealed law enforcement views physical fitness testing as important, it also revealed the fact that law enforcement agencies are split on what type of physical fitness test to use. Adding to the complexity of this issue is the importance of validation, which was discussed in the literature review. Concerns with validation can explain the fact that a majority of agencies, 33 (58.9%) utilizing a physical fitness test stated they use the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Physical Abilities Test (PAT).

The interviews with subject matter experts provided information on what law enforcement agencies should consider when adopting a physical fitness test. John VanVorst from the FBI, Patrick Walsh from the FWC and Jason Trumbower from the FSUPD all stated in some form that a law enforcement physical fitness test should measure what officers will most likely encounter as physically demanding on-the-job challenges.

Recommendations

All of the information and data obtained through the literature review, methods, results and discussion of this paper provides evidence based research on the importance of physical fitness testing, key elements to consider when selecting a physical fitness test and the best options available for future physical fitness testing. The evidence reveals that physical fitness is in fact important for the profession of law enforcement. The research shows what the key legal issues that must be considered when selecting a physical fitness test are. The evidence on which type of physical fitness test to select is not as clear and the answer comes down to what an agency is looking to accomplish with its physical fitness testing.

To answer the question of which physical fitness test to select the Altamonte Springs Police Department has options that can be broken down into 3 distinct categories. The Altamonte Springs Police Department can continue to use a physical fitness test based on age and gender norms, utilize the FDLE PAT or create a new agency specific physical fitness test.

While the Cooper Institute and its partner the American Council on Exercise (ACE) do not have law enforcement programs, an option is available for law enforcement agencies seeking a physical fitness test based on age and gender norms. The Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) in Glynco, Georgia, offers a training class in the FLETC Physical Efficiency Battery (PEB). The PEB has established times and scores broken down by age and gender in 5 different components for measurement. The 5 measured components are body composition, agility run, sit and reach, bench press and 1.5 mile run. The PEB closely resembles the current testing process the Altamonte Springs Police Department is utilizing and would provide the smoothest transition to use.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Physical Abilities Test (PAT) is another option for the Altamonte Springs Police Department. The PAT is a realistic test based on the fact it simulates the tasks, skills and abilities officers experience on-the-job. The FDLE PAT accomplishes this through 8 identified tasks requiring physical demands on officers. The 8 tasks are exiting a vehicle, running 220 yards, obstacle course, 150-pound dummy drag, obstacle course, running 220 yards, dry firing a weapon and entering a vehicle. The FDLE PAT is validated through statewide statistics and is consistent with national models and industry standards. Concerns for law enforcement agencies regarding the FDLE PAT are based on time limits and the actual tasks identified. The current time an officer must complete the FDLE PAT is 6:04.

The third and possibly most intriguing option for the Altamonte Springs Police Department is to create a physical fitness test designed with the departments mission and goals in mind. To accomplish this the Altamonte Springs Police Department could form a committee, create a bid process and develop a validated test based on the specifics and needs of the agency. This model would be similar to what the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) did in 2015. The benefit to this is the fact the Altamonte Springs Police Department would have input on the physical fitness test during each phase of its creation. The end result could be a realistic physical fitness test that measures exactly what the agency is looking for. It is recognized this process can be lengthy, detailed and expensive for any agency and if this option is selected efforts to mitigate these concerns will need to be addressed.

Commander Brian Foley of the Altamonte Springs Police Department has over 21 years of law enforcement experience beginning in 1999. During his career he has worked in a variety of assignments including Patrol, Narcotics, Training and Community Oriented Policing Services. For the past 15 years he has been a member of the Seminole SWAT Team and is currently serving as an Executive Officer on the Team. He earned a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Florida. He is currently an instructor of several disciplines at the Seminole State Criminal Justice Institute.

References

Altamonte Springs Police Department. (1987). Wellness Program Policy, 87-11.

Bissett, D., Bissett, J., & Snell, C. (2012). Physical agility tests and fitness standards: perceptions of law enforcement officer. *Police Practice and Research, An International Journal*, 13(3), 208-223.

Cooper, K.H. (2014). The cooper institute. Dallas, TX.

Hoover, L.T. (1992). Trends in police physical ability selection testing. *Public Personnel Management*, 21(1), 29-40.

Lagestad, P. (2012). Physical skills and work performance in policing. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 14(1), 58-70

Appendix A Survey Questions

Introduction:

This survey is intended for individuals who manage physical fitness programs for law enforcement agencies. The results will be used to complete a report that looks to examine how agencies select physical fitness testing and how the scores are utilized. If you believe there are individuals within your organization who would be better suited to take this survey, please forward this link to them!

As a token of appreciation for your participation, if you are interested in receiving the final results, please contact Brian Foley at befoley@altamonte.org for a copy.

History:

Does your agency use a physical fitness test

- Yes
- No

Has your agency ever used a physical fitness test?

- Yes
- No

For what reason did your agency never use or stop using a physical fitness test?

Fill in the Blank

Utilization:

What is your agency's physical fitness test utilized for?

- Selection / Hiring Process
- Police Officer re-testing
- Both Selection and re-testing

Frequency:

How frequently does your agency conduct re-testing?

- Every 6 months
- Annually
- Every 2 years
- Other

Description:

Your agency's physical fitness test would best be described as?

- Cooper Standards
- Pat (FDLE)
- A series of exercises
- An obstacle course
- Other

Cooper Standards:

Your agency's use of Cooper Standards would be considered?

- Currently utilizing Cooper Standards
- Never used Cooper Standards
- Used Cooper Standards in the past and have switched to a different physical fitness test

What was the reason your agency replaced Cooper Standards?

- Difficulty training and replacing certified trainers
- Adoption of a test not based on age and gender norms
- Adoption of a more task / job specific test for law enforcement
- Other

Incentive:

Is your agency's physical fitness test incentive based?

- Yes
- No

Performance Appraisal:

Is your agency's physical fitness test related to employee performance appraisals?

- Yes
- No

Factors:

What was the most important factor that went into the selection of a physical fitness test for your agency?

Fill in the blank

What was the least important factor that went into the selection of a physical fitness test for your agency?

Fill in the blank

Suggestions:

Do you have any further information, comments or insight that would be beneficial for the selection of a physical fitness test for an agency?

Fill in the blank

Thank you!