

# Mandatory Physical Fitness Program for Law Enforcement

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to analyze the need for implementing mandatory physical fitness programs within law enforcement agencies. This study uncovered that many law enforcement officers lacked confidence in their physical abilities at times due to a lack of physical conditioning. Even more lacked confidence in their patrol partner's physical ability to assist them while performing on the job. There is overwhelming evidence that law enforcement officers must be motivated to maintain physical fitness. One method of creating immediate motivation is to make physical fitness testing mandatory for maintaining employment.*

## **Introduction**

What is the most important tool in Law Enforcement? The answers that most often come to mind might be a duty weapon, knowledge of the law, or even a well-equipped patrol car. If you really think about it none of these tools are worth much without an able-bodied law enforcement officer fully capable of employing them. Rarely will you find a person that disagrees with the notion that law enforcement officers must maintain physical fitness to safely perform the essential task required to perform the job. Our citizens have an expectation that when they call law enforcement for help, a physically fit, knowledgeable, fully capable officer of the law is coming to provide assistance.

Imagine for a moment that you just arrived at the scene of a physical disturbance occurring on the sixth floor of a complex and learn that the elevator is out. Imagine as you're running up the stairs your back up officer has stopped at the third floor bent over resting his hands on his knees to catch his or her breath. When you arrive at the residence your back up is still lumbering their way up the stairs out of breath, as you reach the door, you can hear a woman screaming "stop you're killing him". You hear furniture breaking and a child crying inside. Without a doubt you feel compelled to rush in. Are you going in alone? I don't know about you, but I would want another back up officer. Someone that was physically capable of providing assistance. How many times are scenarios similar to this played out around the country.

Most law enforcement agencies in the State of Florida require that a person pass a background investigation, weapons qualification, physical examination and physical fitness evaluation to be hired. However, a great number do not have a compulsory fitness program to ensure that their employees continue to maintain a fitness level capable of defending themselves and our citizens. There are hard choices that many times must be made. Many law enforcement officers have a hard time coming to the realization that they are not invincible. It's even harder for administrators to tell a person it may be time

to hang up their gun and badge. The reality is that if a professional football player blows out a knee and it won't heal correctly, he can no longer be a football player. As law enforcement officers we are no different. Our ability to perform physically at any given moment is imperative. If we fail it could mean loss of life or serious injury to the public we serve, our partner, or ourselves. Without a doubt we have an ethical responsibility to maintain ourselves physically to up-hold the oath we have all taken.

Law Enforcement Officers are facing some of the most trying times in our recent history. Major reductions in budgets, rising health care costs and increases in unfunded mandates at the federal and state level to local law enforcement agencies are unprecedented. As stewards of the tax payers trust we must find ways to reduce costs at all levels. Skyrocketing health care costs – including insurance premiums, co-payments and prescription drugs – are contributing to the current economic crisis, weighing heavily on Florida family, business, and government budgets. Personnel costs account for over 80% of the overall budget for most of our police agencies.

The law enforcement profession by nature of the type of work performed does not create an environment for living a healthy life style. Law enforcement officers are unlike other professions such as heavy construction workers, lumberjacks or other heavy laborers who by nature of the work receive a healthy workout daily. Most law enforcement officers spend the majority of their day in their car moving from call to call. As technology increases the need for the patrol person to leave their car has been limited even more with the use of mobile computer terminals which allows the officer or deputy to remotely submit their reports. Officers must find the time to work out, make a conscious effort to receive an adequate amount of sleep and eat healthy. By nature of this type of work, officers tend to miss out on appropriate rest because of odd work schedules, unhealthy eating habits as a result of grabbing a quick bite at a fast food restaurant or failing to find ways to reduce stress. It is abundantly clear that physical fitness and living a healthy lifestyle is important to protecting our most valued resource which is our personnel.

For a fitness program to be effective it requires buy in by all levels of the organization. Agency managers must be willing to expend resources at the front end to enable saving in the future. An effective fitness program is multifaceted. There must be requirements for annual health screening or physical exams, appropriate education and training for living and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Establish goals that will encourage physical fitness. Have a fitness evaluation system in place that is legally defensible because it is correlated back to core tasks required to do the job. We must promote health and fitness with the overall human resources strategy for employee recruitment, retention and productivity.

## **Literature Review**

In the United States, the majority of the population is not considered fit and healthy. With sedentary lifestyles, law enforcement officers are no exception. From 1983 to 1993, a study was conducted by the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research that randomly sampled approximately 1,700 officers from different law enforcement agencies across the country. The fitness levels of the average police officer compared to the general public are below normal especially in areas of aerobic fitness, body fat, abdominal strength,

upper body strength, and lower back flexibility. The data shows that law enforcement officers are less fit in most areas than at least half of all U.S. citizens despite the fact that the physical demands of their profession require that they be more fit than the average person. The fitness level of law enforcement officers has a direct impact on their job performance. Physically fit officers are less likely to be assaulted by offenders. As a group, law enforcement officers have a greater morbidity and mortality rate than the general public, due mostly to cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, and suicide. Recent studies have shown an annual increase in the frequency and severity of cardiovascular incidences among law enforcement personnel. The risk of having a heart attack doubles with each decade of law enforcement service. Because of this, numerous states have adopted the "heart and lung bill," allowing officers who develop cardiovascular disease to take an early retirement. Law enforcement officers suffer more job-related stress than people in other occupations. Many realize that the nature of the profession itself exposes officers to increased levels of stress. Making split-second, lifesaving decisions; facing inherent dangers; working shift work and long hours; and constantly interacting with people who are upset, angry, or uncooperative all take a toll on individuals. Job-related stress is a major health concern for the law enforcement community because it can affect the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of the officers. Stress related emotional problems such as divorce, suicide, and alcoholism are prevalent in the law enforcement community. Physically, stress has been linked to cardiovascular disease, hypertension, lower-back pain, and gastrointestinal disorders. However, exercise and physical activity have been shown to reduce stress levels and alleviate some of the pressures officers feel as part of their profession. By implementing total fitness and wellness programs, employees have fewer sick days, disability related retirements, and injuries. As a result, law enforcement agencies experience a reduction in health care related costs. (Quigley, 2008)

Collingwood, Hoffman and Smith have for the last 30 years, been actively involved in establishing physical fitness programs and standards in hundreds of municipal, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Those agencies ask how we can prove that being physically fit is job related. The confusion exists due to several issues: Practical concerns such as what physical training programs will develop the fitness required for the job and help prevent injuries and for legal concerns such as disparate impact, age, and disabled discrimination. For these physical fitness tests and standards to be validated they must be job related and consistent with business necessity. Case law indicates physical fitness tests must be tailored to significantly correlate with the performance of essential job functions. Validation studies are designed to determine if a physical test is an accurate predictor of an officer's ability to perform physical job tasks. During test development, job tasks are reviewed by subject matter experts to develop relevant simulation scenarios. These scenarios must objectively represent the physical tasks officers are expected to perform as part of their employment duties. Using data collected in the last 15 years, it is now possible to document that fitness areas such as aerobic and anaerobic power, strength, flexibility, explosive power, and agility underlie specific task performance. (Collingwood, Hoffman and Smith, 2004).

What is fitness? Physical fitness is the ability to perform physical activities, such as job tasks, with enough reserve energy for emergency situations. Fitness is obtained

through a combination of physical fitness training, diet and nutrition, weight management, smoking cessation, substance abuse prevention and stress management. The importance of maintaining cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, anaerobic power and flexibility directly related to performing the essential tasks of a law enforcement officer. In a 1977 study by the International Association of Chiefs of Police revealed 75% of the general population had better cardio respiratory endurance levels than police officers. Most police officers have little day to day physical activity on the job. They must work at maintaining physical conditioning in most cases on their own time. There are many benefits of maintaining a fitness program including improved job performance, reduction in the likelihood of excessive force, sick leave and lower health care costs. There are many components to physical fitness. Cardiovascular endurance, which means the body's ability to perform physical activity that requires the body to combine its energy sources with oxygen. Sometimes referred to as aerobic power, endurance, stamina or cardio respiratory endurance, this is important to law enforcement officers during pursuits that last longer than two minutes and use of force situations. Muscular strength relates to the muscles ability to generate maximum force. An example would be carrying a person from a burning building or pushing a car out of traffic. Muscular endurance, this measures your muscles ability to make repeated contractions without too much fatigue, like running up stairs or struggling to gain control of a suspect. Anaerobic power is the ability to make short intense burst of maximal effort, like chasing a suspect who just ran from you. Flexibility is the range of motion of part of the body around a joint. This is important for reaching or bending down to pick up an object. Body composition, this is the balance between lean and fat tissue in your body. Generally, the lower your percent of body fat, the more efficient your movement. Many of the physical tasks associated with your job, even if not performed often could have unfavorable results if failed. The bottom line is that it doesn't matter how frequently you may be called upon to perform a physical task if it is critical. If you are not fit enough and fail, at best you've failed to do your duties. At worst you may have just gotten yourself killed or someone else. You may rarely be called upon to use your firearm, but it is critically important that you know how to use it effectively if called upon to do so. Impediments to fitness and health include sedentary lifestyle, poor nutrition, obesity, stress, smoking and alcohol or substance abuse. Only 22% of American adults get at least 30 minutes of light to moderate exercise five or more times a week, and less than 10% exercise vigorously three times per week. Dietary fat makes up 34% of the calories in the average American diet. This increases the risk of heart disease, breast and colon cancer. Over one third of Americans are overweight. This has been linked to chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and cancer. Stress can be a secondary factor in major health problems such as heart disease, hypertension, cancer, ulcers and lower back pain. Smoking doubles the chance of heart attack, causes 20% of deaths from stroke and 85% of lung cancer, emphysema and chronic bronchitis. About 18 million people in America currently have problems due to alcohol. The benefits of a fitness program include improved job performance, improved performance of physical tasks, and reduced likelihood of excessive force. Health benefits through the prevention of health problems are longer life and less risk of disability. Organizational benefits include fewer

sick days, improved productivity and reduced health care cost. (Hoffman, Collingwood, 1995)

The Cooper Institute has worked with law enforcement, public safety and the military since 1978 to help develop fitness tests which are valid and legally defensible in court. Their recommendation help ensure a fit work force. Current legislation requires that fitness tests be job related and scientifically valid. The fitness components must have an underlying factor performing essential and/or critical physical functions of the job (Construct validity). It must also predict who can and cannot perform the essential or critical physical functions of the job. (Criterion Validity) The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1991, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) prohibit discrimination against protected classes. (Females, minorities, handicapped or older adults) However, if job relatedness is established and documented, then fitness tests, standards and programs can discriminate against anybody. It is important that tests and standards programs discriminate only against those who can or cannot do the job regardless of age, race, gender or handicap condition. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 Section 106 addresses the issue of same job, same standard. If the goal of the agency is to maintain compliance with this standard then there should be a single cut point for everyone. The use of single standard for everyone could have a negative impact on females. So it is important that the standards be validated and the test cut points predict who can and cannot do the job. If this standard is met then it should be legally defensible in court. (Cooper Institute, n.d.).

The advent of technology, scientific discovery, and industrial growth changed the way of life in America. We don't get up to change the television we use a remote. We drive to work, ride buses to school, even use golf carts on the golf course. Garage doors open automatically, dish washers do the dishes. Many more people surf the internet than waves in the ocean. We don't climb stairs we ride elevators and escalators. We then wonder why we are getting obese and out of shape. What people refer to as the good life has turned into a sedentary life style of sitting around on the couch eating fast food full of fat and sugars. Social Scientists in the 1960s predicted that all this technology would increase leisure time. In actuality it has created a much higher demand for all of us to be more productive and to do more with less. The unrelenting pace has forced us to constantly hurry resulting in chronic stress. Most deaths in America are preventable and a result of life style choices. Smoking is responsible for 1 in 5 deaths. The rapid rise in the obesity rate will soon surpass smoking as the leading cause of death. Infectious diseases are exceeded by chronic disease as a cause of death. Chronic disease is disease that develops over many years and is heavily influenced by life style. Chronic diseases are heart disease, cancer, stroke, type 2 diabetes, atherosclerosis, obesity, and osteoporosis. Chronic disease accounts for 70 percent of all deaths in the United States and also causes major limitations on the daily living of 1 out of every ten Americans. Most young adults are more concerned with the present rather than the future. Many underestimate the consequences of chronic disease. The United States spends twice as much on health care than any other nation in the world. National health care expenses are \$2.5 trillion annually and that number rises every year. Cardiovascular disease cost more than \$300 billion annually. Dr. Andrew Weil concurs that a radical transformation from disease intervention to disease prevention is the only way to make

health care costs effective. Determinants of health and longevity are affected by several factors including heredity, social circumstances, environmental conditions, medical care and life style behavior. The largest contributing factor is life style.

(Robbins, Powers, Burgess, 2011)

The below information is copied directly from the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Policy Manual. I purposefully left this information as written to avoid any misstatement or confusion. It describes the methods and standards by which the physical abilities tests are conducted by the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. This program was just implemented January 2011. The policy also describes the actions taken should a person fail to meet the minimum physical standards by January 2012. This program was modeled after a successful program by the Citrus County Sheriff's Office. The Okaloosa County Physical Abilities Test (PAT) consists of the following: All sworn employees will be required to complete the PAT, which is approximately one-half mile in length and consists of 16 obstacles/stations.

Completion of the course will consist of the following (not necessarily in this exact order):

- a. Begin the course seated in a vehicle with the seat belt on and both hands on the steering wheel. When instructed, they will exit the vehicle, removing a training shotgun from the trunk. While using the vehicle as cover, they will simulate charging or "racking" the weapon, pulling the trigger, and laying the weapon down with the safety "on". (Tests agility)
- b. Sprint 40 yards. (Tests quickness/speed)
- c. Climb over a wall approximately four feet in height. (Tests agility)
- d. Run a serpentine, which will consist of 10 poles each placed approximately two yards apart. (Tests agility)
- e. Jump over three hurdles of various heights (12", 18", and 24") spaced several yards apart without knocking the hurdle off its stand. (Tests agility)
- f. Crawl fewer than three markers placed approximately 27 inches from the ground and eight feet long without knocking over the markers from their stand. (Tests agility)
- g. Jump over and clear a marked area of approximately four feet in length (simulated ditch/pit). (Tests agility)
- h. Proceed through a large pipe approximately four to five feet in diameter. (Tests agility)
- i. Cross a balance beam consisting of three 10-foot logs, for a total of 30 feet in length. The member must touch the red marker of the last log (or beyond) with at least one foot. (Tests agility)

- j. Climb a ladder approximately two stories high (15 feet) and touch a bell at the top. When climbing down, the member must touch the next-to-last rung (marked with red) with at least one foot. (Tests agility)
- k. Climb a flight of stairs to a simulated one-story landing. When climbing down, the member must touch the next-to-last stair (marked with red) with at least one foot. (Tests agility and stamina)
- l. Proceed through a door with a training weapon drawn, properly identify a suspect, and then holster the weapon. A description of the suspect(s) will be provided at the beginning of the course. (Tests memory, sight, hearing, and gross motor skills)
- m. Climb through a window opening with training weapon drawn then holster -or- approach the window with the weapon drawn, look through the window, then holster and proceed through the window. (Tests agility)
- n. Drag a weight of approximately 150 pounds a distance of seventy feet. (Tests stamina and endurance)
- o. Return to the vehicle and “dry-fire” a training handgun six times with each hand. (Tests fine motor skills)
- p. Re-enter the vehicle, closing the door, and indicate that the assignment has been completed over the radio microphone. (Tests fine motor skills, memory, and logic)
- q. Failure to properly identify the correct suspect or failure to successfully complete any individual segment of the course disqualifies the attempt. Failure of an individual segment may be repeated as long as the overall time does not exceed 8:30:00.

## 6. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PHYSICAL ABILITIES TEST (PAT)

- a. The PAT will be required biannually (Twice per year) for all sworn personnel.
- b. Testing will be limited to daylight hours with due regard for temperature and humidity. Testing during times of extreme temperature and/or humidity will be avoided.
- c. Members meeting the established minimum standard of eight minutes, 30 seconds (8:30:00) for the PAT will be deemed to be in compliance with the fitness policy.
- d. Members who do not meet the minimum standard (as described above) shall be considered to have failed the PAT.
- e. Failure to meet the minimum PAT standards will be designated by category as follows:
  - I. “Category 1”: Failed to complete the course in less than 10 minutes and 30 seconds (10:30).

II. "Category 2": Completed the course in less than 10 minutes and 30 seconds (10:30), but more than 8 minutes and 30 seconds (8:30).

#### 7. CATEGORY 1 FAILURE

Effective January 1, 2012, excluding exemptions as provided herein, a sworn employee who does not complete the PAT in less than 10 minutes and 30 seconds (10:30) will:

- a. Immediately be removed from sworn status.
- b. Be placed on leave without pay or at their request be authorized up to 30 days annual leave.
- c. Be ineligible for any specialty team assignments.
- d. Have any specialty pay discontinued.
- e. Be ineligible for off-duty assignments or secondary employment.
- f. Be responsible to fulfill all court and court-related responsibilities, attend scheduled in-service training and be compensated accordingly. During this time period, members will not be authorized to attend training offered outside of the agency.
- g. If successful completion of the PAT is not achieved within 30 days of the original failure, sworn personnel in category 1 may at the discretion of the Sheriff be permanently reassigned to non-sworn positions, if qualified, or if non-sworn positions are unavailable be terminated from the agency.

#### 8. CATEGORY 2 FAILURE

Effective January 1, 2012, excluding exemptions as provided herein, a sworn employee who completed the PAT in less than 10 minutes and 30 seconds (10:30) but more than 8 minutes and 30 seconds (8:30) will:

- a. Be placed on 30 days probationary status.
- b. Be ineligible for any specialty team assignments.
- c. Have any specialty pay discontinued.
- d. Not be authorized to attend training offered outside of the agency.
- e. Be ineligible for off-duty assignments or secondary employment.



- f. If successful completion of the PAT is not achieved during the 30-day probationary period the member may at the discretion of the Sheriff be placed on 30-day unpaid level or at their request be authorized 30 days annual leave. If at the end of this 30-day period the member has not successfully completed the PAT the member may at the discretion of the Sheriff be permanently reassigned to non-sworn positions, if qualified, or if non-sworn positions are unavailable be terminated from the agency (Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office General Order 36.12, 2011)

## **Methods**

The purpose of this research was to assess the need for standardized fitness testing of incumbent law enforcement officers. A survey instrument was crafted to solicit the personal perceptions of incumbent law enforcement officers within an agency that is currently undergoing shift in philosophy with regard to physical fitness testing. This survey was sent to all sworn law enforcement officers employed by the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. This agency has 267 sworn personnel and now requires fitness level testing of all personnel twice per year. The anonymous ten question survey asked questions of their perception of the need for such testing. The survey analyzed whether their fitness level has ever affected their ability to perform their duties and if so, how. The survey asked whether or not they have ever been involved in a situation where another officer's fitness level caused them concern during an incident. This question also solicited as a follow-up how they were affected. Participants were asked to provide their age range and years of experience.

One of the limiting factors to this survey was that emotion and anxiety was high as expressed by many due to the fact this was a new program within the agency. This could also be considered strength, due to the fact that the subject is fresh in everyone's mind and many are concerned about maintaining proper fitness. I am curious to see if the personal perceptions of the personnel surveyed correlate to the information uncovered during the literature review. A copy of this survey is included at the end of this paper, as Appendix A.

## **Results**

A link to the survey program was forwarded by e-mail to the 267 sworn employees of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. 124 of the employees responded to the survey giving a 46% response rate. An overwhelming number of employees support a mandatory fitness program. 95.2 % believe there should be a minimum physical fitness standard for entry level as well as incumbent personnel. 98.4 % either agreed or strongly agreed that maintaining a high level of fitness is important for law enforcement personnel. Only 10.5 % rated their fitness level as excellent, 41.1 % rated theirs as good, 33.9 % as fair and 14.5 % rated it as poor. 76.6 % believed that it is important for their employer to provide formal total wellness training. One of the more alarming results of the survey is that 23.4 % of those surveyed indicated that their fitness level has affected their ability to

perform their duties. In the follow up question many responded that they had the inability to pursue fleeing suspect or lack of stamina when making physical arrests or defending themselves. Another surprising result was 35 % indicated that the fitness level of another law enforcement officer caused them concern during an incident they had been involved in. A follow-up question asked that they describe how they were affected. The responses are listed below:

- *I question the ability of some who may not be able to complete physical tasks in order to make an arrest or properly back-up an officer in need.*
- *Another officer could not keep up in a foot chase and left me vulnerable because I was solo.*
- *One occasion, unable to assist adequately due to lack of physical ability, while I had to wrestle with the suspect.*
- *Multiple times throughout my L.E career I have questioned momentarily if my partner was in good enough shape, shouldn't happen I don't think....*
- *Back up officer was not able to keep up when tracking a suspect.*
- *During several calls, I see that lazy/unfit officers are not fit for the job in question.*
- *Some do not have the ability to pursue.*
- *There was a situation where a foot chase ensued and the backup officer was overweight and could not keep up, so had the situation had taken a turn for the worse, there was no back up.*
- *Too heavy to move quickly or run.*
- *Because of their fitness level can that Officer keep up or stay in the fight.*
- *Stamina in a fight with a suspect.*
- *Unable to keep up in a chase, and have had to push them out of a fight because they were so winded.*
- *I once had a struggle and a morbidly obese officer arrived on scene during the struggle. A foot chase ensued and I found myself chasing the subject by myself. After catching the subject, a second struggle ensued and I once again found myself without backup.*

- *While I was a K-9 handler, other deputies were supposed to provide cover for me while tracking a suspect. Within the first minute it was always just me and my K-9 as the deputies could not keep up.*
- *Officers experiencing difficulty breathing after a pursuit. Use of unnecessary force because physical stamina did not allow the officer to control subject without baton strikes.*
- *Have worked with numerous officers in poor health, both obese and aged. They are not capable of providing adequate back up in an altercation or pursuit and cause divided attention because of concern for their wellbeing.*
- *Attempting to apprehend a suspect and the other officer was not able to keep up.*
- *Overweight w/ poor cardiovascular health. Hard to even get out of car. Bad guy sizes them up and feels they are no risk. Can't chase bad guys. Can't get over or around obstacles.*
- *Backup unable to keep up or surmount obstacles in the performance of duty.*
- *I have worked with older officers. I was concerned about their well-being during physically demanding incidents.*
- *I have become concerned when responding to calls of a violent nature when my backup officer is less capable of dealing with a physical altercation. There are deputies who are timid because they are less physically fit. This leads to their own apprehension before joining an altercation; something easily observed by an opponent/suspect.*
- *YES! When you're fighting with a suspect you prefer to have a physically capable officer assist you. My safety relies upon my partner's physical fitness level. It's OK for the fat cop to show up after the fight is over, but only if he brings bagels and fruit.*
- *Concerns over out of shape officer being able to assist in a physical altercation. I had to help due to them being out of breath and about to lose the fight.*
- *Sure, when you work with someone extremely overweight, you wonder if they would be able to get to you if needed in an emergency.*
- *Partner's inability to chase a fleeing subject.*
- *So out of shape could not keep up to assist.*
- *Person had trouble running, keeping up.*

- *When I was younger I was more apt to chase the bad guys on foot, now I would rather pursue them via vehicle first then resort to a foot chase.*
- *I was in a foot chase with a burglary suspect at night in a wooded area. I chased the subject approx. 300 yards down a sandy road and then into the woods off the road another 200 or so yards. I caught the suspect and after a brief struggle took him into custody. My back up who was overweight and out of shape started the foot chase the same time I did. However, he was nowhere to be found during the apprehension. I met him half way back to the car as he was still walking through the deep sand on the road. Out of breath and about to pass out.*
- *Officer inability to keep up during a short foot pursuit left me without backup.*
- *The other deputy could not keep up during a foot pursuit of a suspect.*
- *The ability of another officer to back me up, during a foot pursuit, or ongoing physical confrontation.*
- *A suspect ran from another officer while I was making an arrest on a second subject. The officer refused to attempt chase due to their lack of physical ability to engage in a foot pursuit.*
- *Agency member had a heart attack on duty.*
- *His inability to protect himself.*
- *They were unable to keep up during a foot chase*
- *Overweight fellow officer unable to provide aid during altercation*
- *Have been involved in several foot chases over the years and have had to stop and provide assistance in a bad area due to another officer collapsing due to no wind.*

## **Discussion**

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the need to establish mandatory physical fitness programs for law enforcement. The research conducted within the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office revealed an overwhelming majority (95%) feel that there is a need for mandatory fitness programs. Forty Eight percent of those who responded to the survey rated their own fitness as being fair or poor. One of the more surprising factors was the number of participants who indicated either their physical fitness or the fitness level of another officer caused them concern while performing their duties. The alarming aspect of this statistic is what bearing the fitness level of an officer has on their decision to act. During the literature review I discovered there is

overwhelming evidence that, by nature of the job, law enforcement officers must find the motivation to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Studies show that the sedentary effects of the job have life altering effects on law enforcement officer's bodies. As a result law enforcement officer's lives are cut short.

There is no question that law enforcement officers must be physically capable of defending themselves and the public they have sworn to protect. The question now is how far are we as a profession willing to go to insure that all law enforcement officers maintain their fitness. Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office has joined many other agencies in the state of Florida to make this a requirement.

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Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office General Order 36.12 pg 6-9, (2011, January)  
Retrieved from website: [www.sheriff-okaloosa.org](http://www.sheriff-okaloosa.org), March 21, 2011

Captain Ted Pecot has been in law enforcement for 33 years. He spent his first 20 years as a law enforcement specialist and criminal investigator in the United States Air Force. He began his civilian law enforcement career with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office in 1998. Since that time, he has worked road patrol, community policing, marine patrol, road patrol supervisor, and special operations unit commander. He is currently a district commander with the patrol services division over the southeast region of Okaloosa County.

## Appendix A

**1. Maintaining a high level of physical fitness is important for law enforcement personnel?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**2. What best describes your current fitness level?**

- Excellent (30 minutes or more of exercise 5 times per week)
- Good (30 minutes or more of exercise 3 times per week)
- Fair (30 minutes or more of exercise 2 times per week)
- Poor (Rarely exercise)

**3. Do you feel that it is important for your employer to provide formal total wellness training? (Fitness and Disease prevention through proper nutrition, exercise, sleep and stress relief)**

- Yes
- No

**4. Has your fitness level ever affected your ability to perform your duties?**

- Yes
- No

**5. If you answered yes to question #4 please explain below.**

**6. Has the fitness level of another law enforcement officer ever caused you concern during an incident you were involved in?**

- Yes
- No

**7. If you answered yes to #6 please explain below.**

**8. Do you believe there should be minimum physical fitness standards for law enforcement personnel? (Entry level as well as incumbent personnel)**

- Yes
- No

**9. What is your current age?**

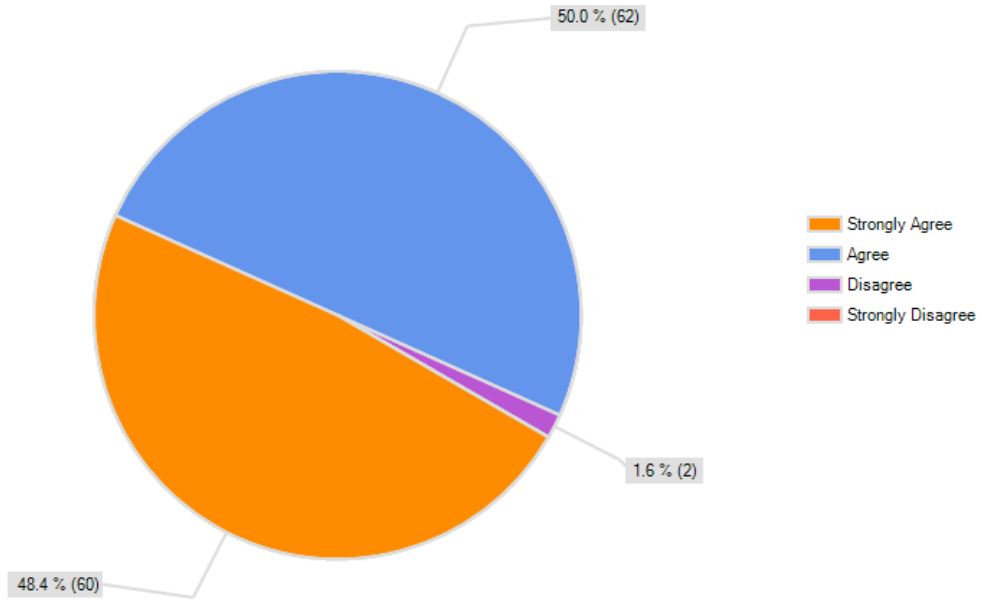
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- Over 50

**10. How many years of law enforcement experience do you have?**

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- Over 20

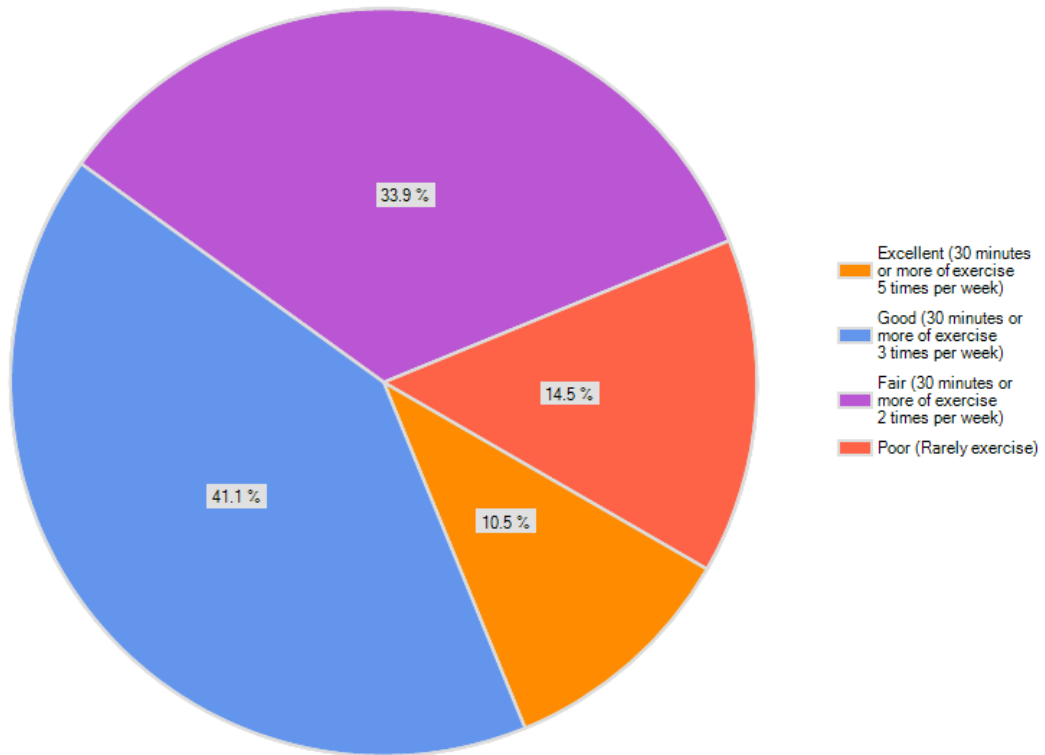
## APPENDIX B

Maintaining a high level of physical fitness is important for law enforcement personnel?

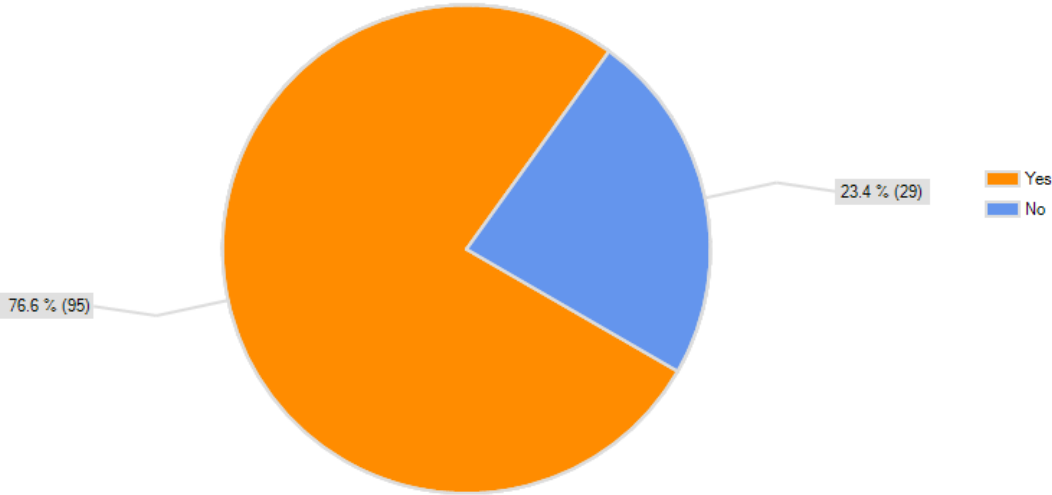




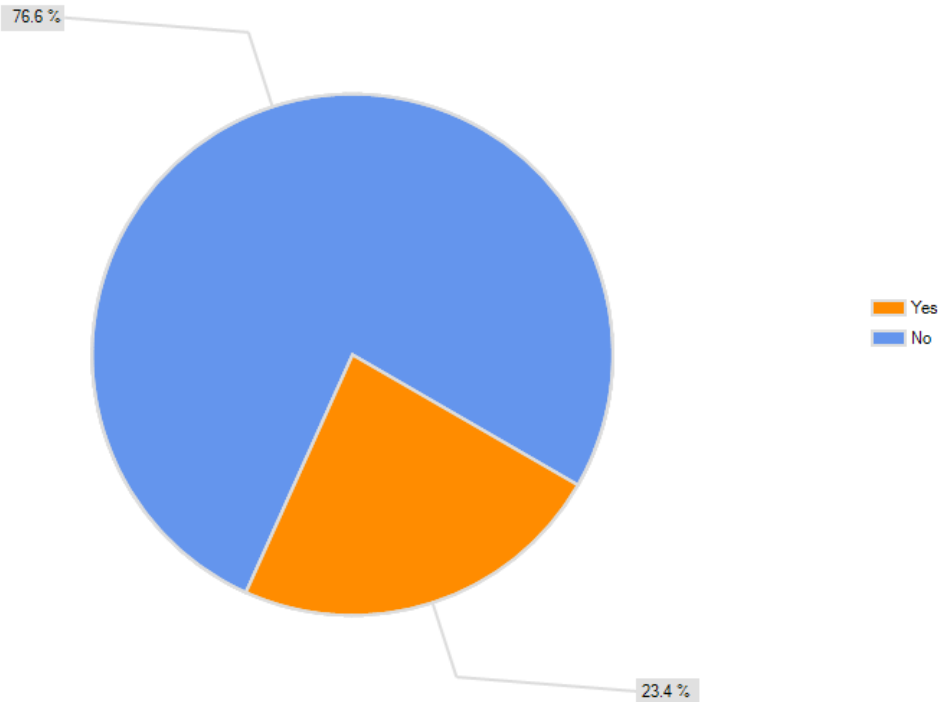
**What best describes your current fitness level?**



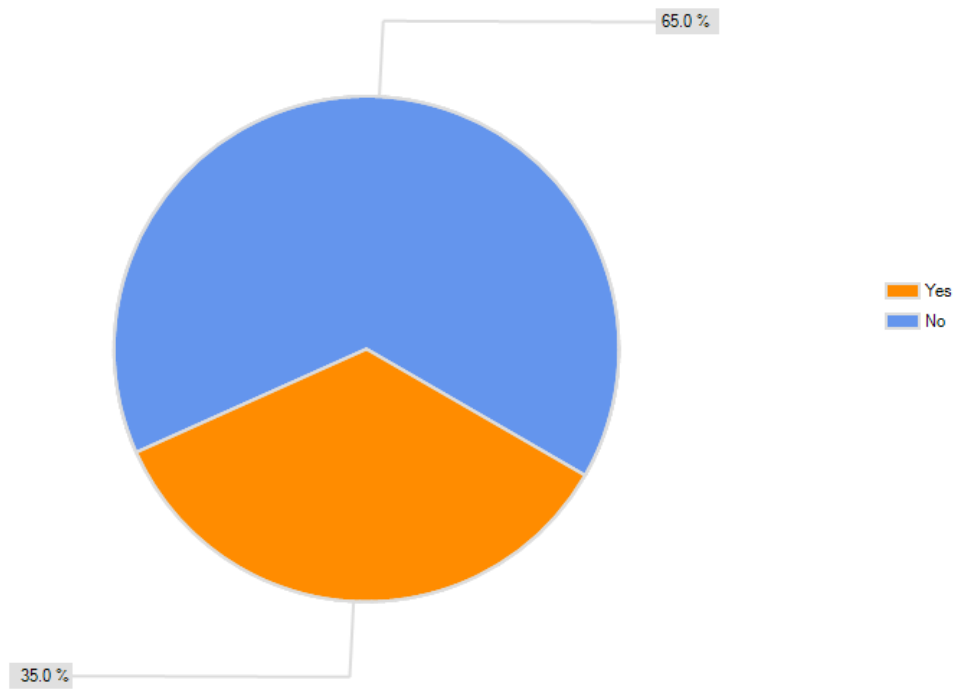
**Do you feel that it is important for your employer to provide formal total wellness training? (Fitness and Disease prevention through proper nutrition, exercise, sleep and stress relief)**



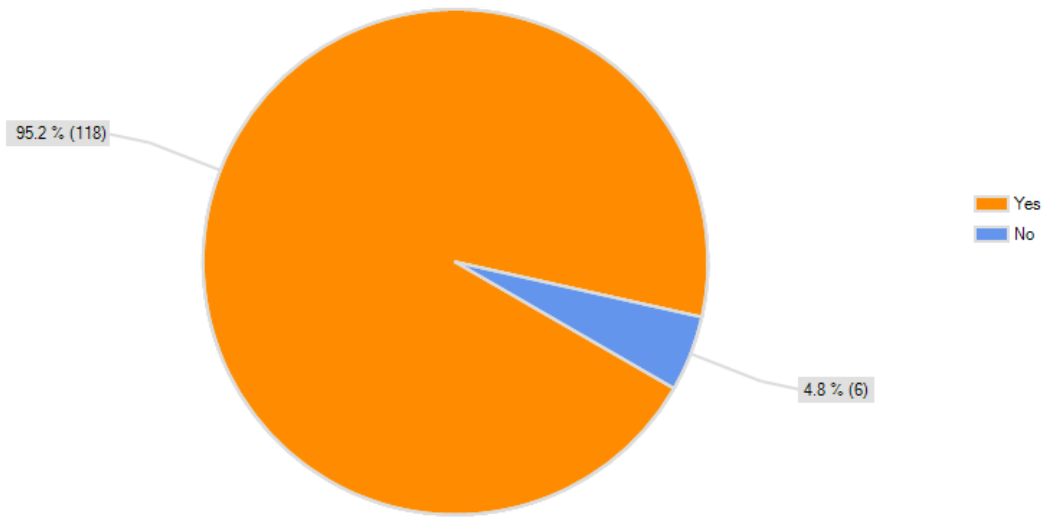
Has your fitness level ever affected your ability to perform your duties?



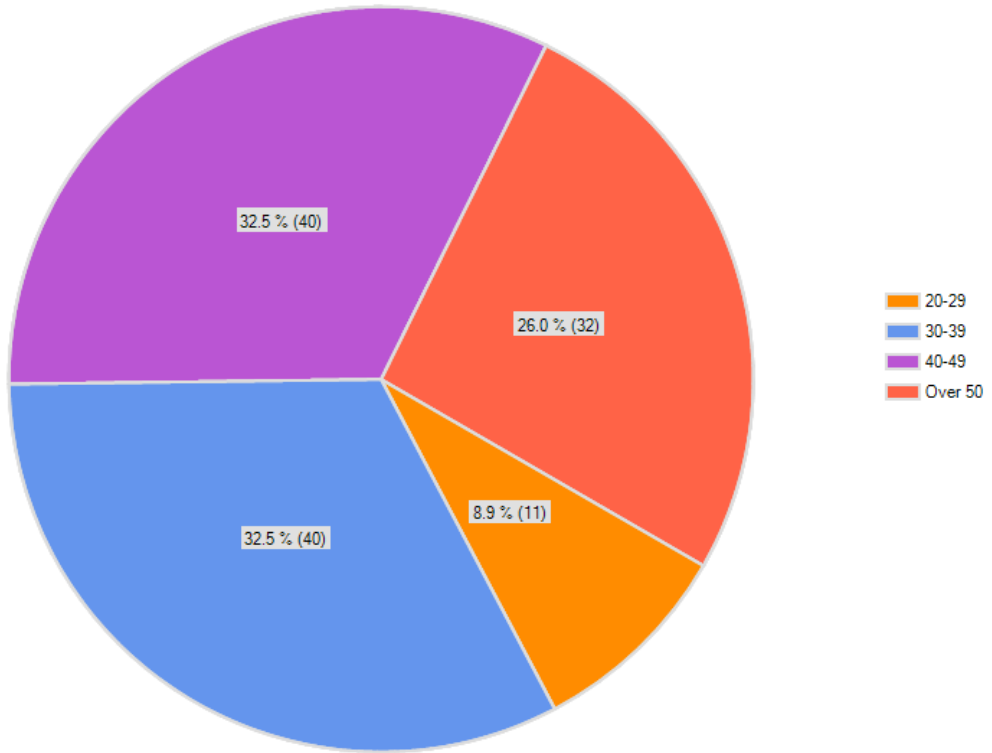
Has the fitness level of another law enforcement officer ever caused you concern during an incident you were involved in?



Do you believe there should be minimum physical fitness standards for law enforcement personnel? (Entry level as well as incumbent personnel)



**What is your current age?**



How many years of law enforcement experience do you have?

