



Fitness and Training Used to Purge Old Timers

Dear Reader:

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Police officers with lengthy service often express the opinion that a physical ability program is nothing more than an effort to replace the old timers with younger officers. This criticism may be well founded in some cities, when a local elected official begins to look around and notices fit and trim young officers as well as older officers, who may be overweight and exhibit a sedentary life style. A little talk around city hall expressing this criticism will almost certainly make it back to the subjects of the criticism, and then the policy issue has been reduced to a "they are out to get us issue."

It is natural that an officer who has considerable years of service, maybe 20+ years with the department, and who needs 30 years of service to retire with full benefits, would feel uneasy about an effort to begin requiring that all officers be required to undergo an annual medical examination and demonstrate that they can run a mile or mile and one-half in a certain time period, do sit ups, pull ups, and other types of physical ability tests. Failure to pass the ability test may result in the officer losing his/her job. It should be recognized that a long time police officer, who is 52 years of age is not expected to be as physically fit as a 31-year-old officer. The older officer should, however, be able to perform the essential functions of the job.

A major obstacle to physical testing and training is to convince police officers and firefighters, who may have considerable political influence with the elected officials, that physical fitness and physical training is about protecting the health and safety of the public and the lives of the officers and firefighters and not about unreasonably terminating an employee because he/she cannot pass a medical exam or physical ability test. One way to overcome this concern is to develop a physical ability program that requires the participation of every officer and firefighter, a program that provides an individualized fitness program tailored to each officer or firefighter, and then give a reasonable time frame to meet basic physical ability requirements. In large departments, officers may be transferred to desk jobs where they are not required to respond to emergencies. In smaller departments this is much more difficult, because there are not many desk jobs in small departments. There is, however, the opportunity to transfer officers, who cannot meet the basic physical ability requirements of the job, to another department of the city. Employees who cannot perform the physical requirements of the job should be given reasonable time and assistance to improve their physical capabilities so they can perform the physical requirements of the job and pass the test.

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