Fire Prevention Week from a Physical Educator's Perspective

Richard D. Wetzel **Amrit Chima**

The fire alarm sounds and fire and emergency medical service (EMS) personnel scramble to put on their gear and run to their equipment in anticipation of the forthcoming event. The call comes in: a structure fire with trapped individuals. Hearts race, adrenaline flows, and emotions begin to run high. The command officer reminds each individual to stay relaxed and focused on the job at hand. The success and safety of all depend on their ability to focus on what they need to do. They wonder, "Am I ready for this? I have trained and practiced. I know what to do, so let's go!" While each individual may deal with the emotional challenge of this event differently, the physical demands can be life threatening. Carrying a hose up two flights of stairs, breaking a door down, and carrying a child to safety demand strength, endurance, and concentration. Therefore a higher level of physical fitness must be maintained by fire and EMS personnel.

Among the many special programs that schools include in their broader curriculum, Fire Prevention Week is a common national observance. But what does this have to do with K-12 physical education programs? How can this relate to physical education lesson or unit plans? Typically, conversations about fire prevention focus on safety measures and emergency procedures. Some teachers provide students with take-home worksheets on home safety or create assignments that include testing smoke alarms and planning emergency escape routes with their families. At school, fire trucks and fire equipment are often displayed and children are allowed to explore them. There is also discussion about not being afraid of a firefighter dressed in protective clothing, equipment, and a breathing mask.

Fire Prevention Week also provides opportunities to teach more than civic awareness. It is an opportunity to discuss the health and fitness requirements of fire and EMS personnel. What does it take for firefighters to perform their job successfully? What level of fitness and training is required? How does this training relate to the aspects of health-related fitness that are outlined in national or state physical education standards? By extending the focus of fire prevention to the physical education curriculum, students have an opportunity to deepen their awareness of important health and fitness concepts. Due to the rigors of their profession, these individuals need to attain and maintain a higher level of cardiovascular fitness and muscular strength than most people.

In the field of physical education, fitness levels are measured through fitness and challenge programs such as Fitnessgram, the President's Council on Physical Fitness, the National Physical Fitness Award, and others. While there are several fitness recommendations presented by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA, 2007), there are no strict national standards. A firefighter's elevated fitness level not only benefits the overall health of the individual but may contribute to better performance at the scene of an accident, injury, illness, or fire. Numerous fire and EMS personnel take it upon themselves to attain and then maintain high levels of fitness. Their exercise regimen includes strength, agility, and cardiovascular-endurance training.

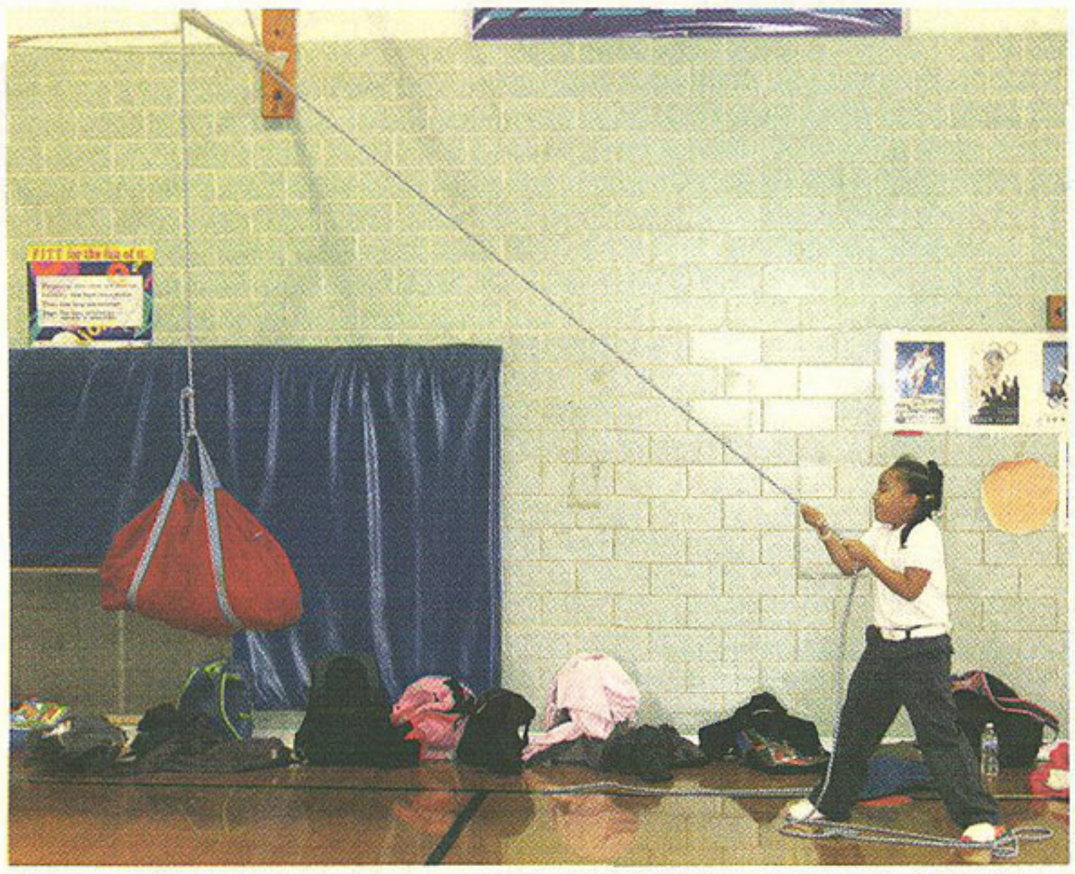
Fire and EMS personnel can also participate in a fitness challenge called the Firefighter Combat Challenge. This challenge consists of five specific events, but is timed from the beginning of Event One until participants cross the finish line at the end of Event Five. Each event in the challenge mimics the physical requirements and possible scenarios that firefighters face on the job.

A simplified list of the challenge events is provided in table 1. In order to better visualize the events, one can view a video of

Table 1. Combat Challenge Events

Event 1—High-Rise Pack Carry	Climb a five-story tower (staircase) carrying a 42 lb. hose load
Event 2—Hose Hoist	Pull a 42 lb. donut roll of hose up to the top of the tower. Quickly descend the tower.
Event 3—Forcible Entry	Using a nine-pound sledge hammer, drive (knock) a 160 lb. beam a horizontal distance of five feet.
Event 4—Hose Advance	Run 140 feet in a zig-zag pattern around cones. Pick up and drag a charged (full of water) hose 75 feet, push through a swinging double door and spray and knock down a target.
Event 5—Victim Rescue	Drag a 175 lb. mannequin 100 feet to the finish line.

Source: Firefighter Combat Challenge (2010).



In the Hose Hoist event, raising a weighted bag offers a good substitute for pulling a fire hose up a steep incline.

As if kicking in a door, a boy kicks a folded gym mat in the Forcible Entry event.

Photos courtesy of the authors

the challenge on the Internet. On Google.com, *search for* "Firefighter Combat Challenge" and scroll down to videos, or on Youtube.com, search for "firefighter combat challenge."

A modified version of the Firefighter Combat Challenge (2010) could be used in a physical education class as a way to assess student fitness levels or to teach about areas of health-related fitness such as muscular strength and endurance and cardiovascular fitness. For instance, the challenge is conducted as a single, timed course for individuals. In a physical education setting, the course could be separated into individual events, performed as a relay or team event, or be included in an annual school event such as a field day.

Each of these events call into play a number of fitness and motor-skill components, as displayed in table 2, affording the teacher the opportunity to meet multiple curriculum- and standards-based goals within each event. The events could also be modified for a physical education class setting. Below is a list of possible modifications for each event; however, all of these suggestions should be evaluated and adapted to maintain age and developmental appropriateness.

Event 1: High-Rise Pack Carry

•This event requires stairs or bleachers that are available for use by the physical education class. Students carry a bag of basketballs, cones, or other items up a group of stairs or bleachers, across the bleacher or stage, and down the stairs on the other side. Students may run the course once or several times, based on their fitness level. In place of the bag of equipment, teachers could substitute a coiled and secured outdoor hose or extension cord to be carried on one's shoulder.

• Stack mats into a pyramid (based on age appropriateness or quantity available) and have students climb over one or more with a loaded bag or backpack. *Multiple* pyramids can be used to increase difficulty.

Event 2: Hose Hoist

• Drape a rope over a basketball backboard or some other high structure and secure a weight (bag of items) to one end. Students will pull the rope, hand-over-hand, until the weight touches the basketball rim. Students may not run tugging on the rope to pull the items; they must keep their feet in place.

•Tie a rope to a solid stationary object. The students lie or sit on a carpet square (carpet side down)

Table 2. Coordinated Fitness Categories

Event 1—High-Rise Pack Carry

- Cardiovascular fitness
- Leg strength
- Arm and shoulder strength
- Balance

Event 2—Hose Hoist

- Arm, shoulder, and upper back strength
- Manipulative skill and accuracy
- Balance
- Depth perception

Event 3—Forcible Entry (depending on activity)

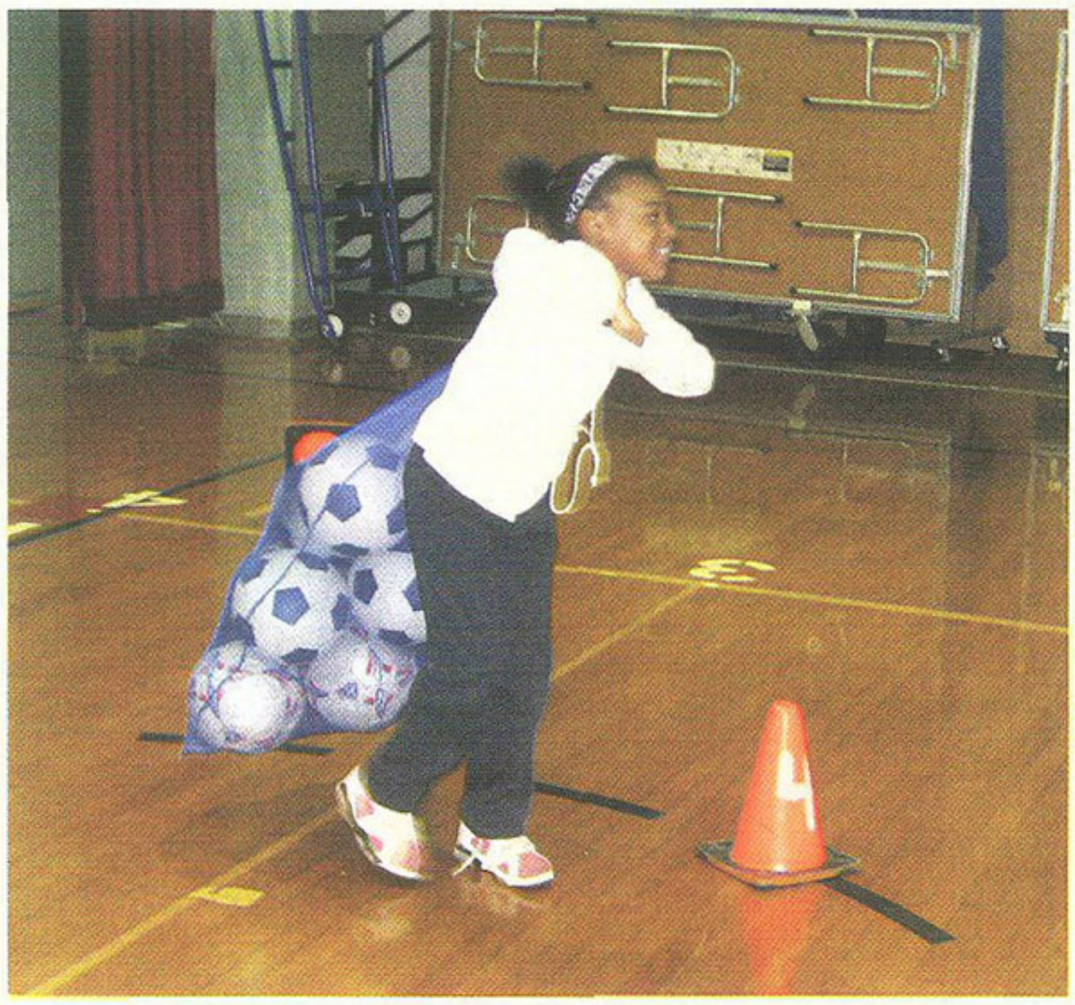
- Arm and shoulder strength
- *Visual accuracy*
- Tracking

Event 4—Hose Advance (depending on target and activity area)

- Cardiovascular endurance
- Agility
- Tracking
- Visual accuracy
- Throwing technique

Event 5—Victim Rescue

- Upper-body strength
- Cardiovascular endurance



Photos courtesy of the authors

In the Hose Advance (left), a girl carries a bag of balls through a cone course to simulate the carrying of a fire hose. At the end of the Hose Advance (right), a boy throws a ball (representing water) at a target (representing flames) in order to put the "fire" out.

and, using only their arms and the hand-over-hand method, they pull themselves a specified distance (10-15 feet). Do not use scooters.

• One student pulls a rope connected to a carpet on which another student is sitting (do not use scooters).

Event 3: Forcible Entry

• Students stand with their back facing a folded gymnastics mat. Using a heel, they kick the mat backwards forcing it to slide, until they have covered five feet.

• Using a floor hockey stick, students hit 10 shots into a goal.

• Students sit on a scooter facing forward. Using only their arms, they travel 20 feet around a cone and back.

• Students stand five gymnastic mats up on end (slightly open to maintain standing) in a row. They run down the row knocking down the mats using only a swim noodle.

Event 4: Hose Advance

• Students run 30 to 50 feet on a zig-zag course around cones. At the end of the run, if indoors, the student will pick up a ball (tennis or nerf) from a basket and throw it at a target (such as cardboard flames) until they knock the target down. If the event is outdoors, use water balloons.

Event 5: Victim Rescue

• Students drag a heavy object (developmentally appropriate) a distance of 30 to 50 feet.

• A student pulls a rope connected to a carpet on which another student is sitting (do not use scooters).

• Students drop and log roll a specific distance, such as the length of a gymnastics mat.

Conclusion

Holding a modified Firefighter's Combat Challenge in your K-12 physical education class can add relevance to Fire Prevention Week activities and reinforce the importance of fire and EMS personnel maintaining a good fitness level. During the lessons or events, the physical educator can provide additional information about cardiovascular disease, flexibility, and muscular strength and endurance, and explain how they relate to the overall fitness of those in the fire service. Teachers can even extend the discussion to include components on career development and exploration, or discuss the social and team skills required to perform this type of job and make connections to students' social and group dynamics in physical education.

Teachers, use your imagination to expand on these challenge events. You know best how to ignite the imagination of your students and excite them into wanting to participate in different activities. Talk to your local fire department and find out whether they would be willing to get involved in your program.

There is much more to fire prevention than "stop, drop, and roll." Practical, real-world applications of health and fitness concepts and training reinforce the validity of a physical education program. Fitness should be universal, and having the opportunity to present it in a different context may encourage children not only to be fit, but maybe even to become involved in the fire service in the future.

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and value of physical education. At the university level, professors need to do more to advocate for physical education by partnering with faculty outside of physical education to do research, presentations, and cross-content lectures. The third level of advocacy needs to happen at the professional association level. State and national associations that support physical education (AAHPERD) need to continue to partner with public entities, such as the NFL in the "Keep Gym in School" campaign. Additionally, these associations need to do more by lobbying both at the state and national level for appropriate policies that support quality physical education. Physical education professionals seem to spend too much time with other professionals in related fields. Advocacy will be successful only if professionals spend more time working, researching, and learning with professionals in disparate fields. We need to let ourselves be seen and heard by all members of the school, academic, and political communities.

—Brian S. Funk, doctoral candidate, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV.

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—Jennifer L. VanSickle (vansicklej@yahoo.com) is an associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Indianapolis, in Indianapolis, IN 46227, and a member of the JOPERD *Editorial Board.*

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—Ritchie C. Gabbei (rc-gabbei@wiu.edu) is an associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology at Western Illinois University, in Macomb, IL 61455.

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—Richard D. Wetzel (wetzelrd@muohio.edu) is an assistant professor in the Department of Kinesiology at Miami University–Hamilton, in Hamilton, OH 45011. Amrit Chima (achima@windrush.org) is a physical education teacher and athletic director at the Windrush School, in El Cerrito, CA 94530.

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