

Physical Agility Preparation

The physical agility test is a major part of the examination for the position of firefighter. Understanding this part of the examination and being prepared for it are critical factors for your success.

In physical terms, firefighting is an extremely demanding occupation. It requires agility, strength, and stamina. The firefighting environment is normally hazardous and constantly changing. Firefighting calls for the wearing of special protective clothing and breathing equipment and the use of tools that are often heavy. Because of the extremes encountered in the firefighting environment – hot and cold, wet and dry, night and day, clean and contaminated air – the protective clothing and equipment must be durable and effective. The need for these qualities has led to the development of equipment that is often heavy and cumbersome.

Given the demands of the occupation – saving life and property, the challenges of the environment, and the weight and constraint of the protective equipment, the need to ensure that firefighter recruits are physically capable of learning and performing the tasks required is obvious.

The physical agility examination is designed to evaluate the candidate's ability to perform firefighting activities. In the recent past, the courts have held that the physical agility examination must be related to the tasks that are actually performed by firefighters. Studies reveal that the firefighter must have a high level of aerobic energy, strength, and a significant ability to resist fatigue.

FIREFIGHTER WORKOUTS

REMEMBER THAT 60-70% OF THE PHYSICAL AGILITY EVENTS REQUIRE EXCELLENT LEG STRENGTH AND GOOD WIND ENDURANCE!

Physical agility testing events in most departments are very strenuous in nature. You must begin your workouts immediately in order to put yourself in top condition to perform well. This training should be year-round. In preparing firefighter applicants for physical agility examinations for over 50 years, one of the most important aspects is overall good strength, with emphasis on good leg strength and most importantly your wind endurance (lung strength and capacity). Time and time again we see individuals who are 6'4", 250 pounds, can squat 350 pounds 10 times, run 2 miles and think that they are in good physical shape. However, if they have not built up their wind endurance (lung capacity) they may have the strength equivalent of someone who is 100 pounds. Nothing drains your strength more than a lack of wind. Most physical agility test events are of short duration but very demanding. Most of these events are completed in a 5-10 minute timeframe. During that time, it is an all-out effort. We believe that the emphasis of your preparation training should be on developing your wind. Wind sprints are an excellent way of increasing your endurance. Start

off by sprinting 30 yards, 3 or 4 times. Then proceed to 40 yards, 50 yards. After a period of training and feeling that your lungs are developing, we suggest that you undertake the following physical agility training.

Mark off 20 yards, 30 yards, 40 yards, and 50 yards. Use a nearby recreation field in your area or even a parking lot. Start your sprints by sprinting 20 yards and then sprint back to the start. Then immediately sprint 30 yards and back to start. Then sprint 40 yards and back to start. Sprint 50 yards and back to start. As you continue training, you will see that your wind endurance is building. You may be able to complete 5-6 of these wind sprints in a single training session and not feel winded.

Applicants also need to concentrate on overall strength training – your chest, triceps, biceps, back, legs, sit-ups. We have included descriptions of some physical agility exercises and programs for your review.

SOME ADDITIONAL TRAINING TIPS:

- Many times you are required to wear a vest that is from 30-40 pounds, simulating firefighter equipment and air tank. If possible, get a backpack, fill it with sand or weights, and use it while training. For example, wear it while running stairs.
- Run stairs. If you have a school football field accessible to you, we strongly suggest that you run the stands' stairs. You may also be able to use an office or apartment building stairs. You may also want to run the stairs carrying 20-30 pound dumbbells in each hand or your weighted backpack. It is also good practice to skip every other stair – it will build leg strength and endurance, and on some exams you can skip stairs, which will decrease your overall time and better your score.
- If you train in a gym, you may have access to a Stairmaster machine (revolving stairs – not stepper type). We suggest that you build your endurance by not holding onto the rails and increasing the level of difficulty each time you work out. If you have a training backpack, wear it while on the machine.
- If you train by running distance, the best training for firefighter examinations is to aim for your fastest 2-mile time. If you want to alternate a 3-4 mile run in between, that is fine. Your emphasis while training, however, should not be on a steady pace but on a faster pace in order to build your endurance. Physical agility examinations are short in time, but require endurance.
- Remember - always warm up before exercising and cool down after exercising.
- Do not begin these workouts until you get yourself in good physical condition by jogging 15 to 25 minutes, 3 to 4 times a week for at least 3 to 4 weeks. This will strengthen your heart and lungs so it won't be too much of a demand on your body.