



FITNESS ROOM BEST PRACTICES

A growing trend in fire and emergency medical services is to promote a healthy lifestyle by designating space in stations for fitness equipment. Evidence shows that exercise, as part of a healthy lifestyle, can reduce absenteeism and injury rates, enhance physical and mental resilience, and boost morale. However, exercising does come with some risks. It is important to understand what they are and have policies and processes in place to manage the risks as much as possible.

It is important to maintain a safe environment while exercising. Slips and falls, strains, sprains, scrapes, cuts, bruises, and more serious injuries are possible when using gym and weight-room equipment. The following are best practices for setting up and operating an exercise room at a fire or EMS station.

1. There are many types of exercise equipment available, including free weights and free weight equipment, treadmills and other cardio equipment, and more sophisticated equipment designed to exercise specific parts of the body, to name just a few. Fire and EMS agencies should consider which types of equipment are appropriate for their workforce.
 - a. Consider employing the services of a person with exercise expertise
 - b. Get proposals from multiple exercise equipment suppliers with recommendations for equipment
 - c. Do your research from reliable sources

Document your selection process. It can show the agency did its due diligence from the start.

2. Keep records of who manufactured the equipment, sold the equipment to you, and installed the equipment. Avoid using donated or used equipment. As part of your purchase agreement, obtain the following:
 - a. A written proposal from the installer specifying the type of equipment they recommend installing.
 - b. A written layout for the equipment that considers adequate space for and around the equipment
 - c. An initial Certificate of Insurance from the installer. The COI should be updated annually.
3. Establish an inspection, cleaning, and maintenance schedule and identify the responsible people. It should be in conjunction with recommendations from the equipment manufacturers and installers. It should include frequent visual inspections, documented weekly inspections by a trained representative of the agency, and periodic inspection and maintenance by an authorized representative of the exercise equipment manufacturer. A sample monthly inspection form is available on [MSI Forms and Documents](#). Cleaners and cleaning practices should follow [CDC Guidance](#) for disinfecting gym and exercise equipment.
4. Decide who will be permitted to use the equipment. And when. Will only active responders be allowed to use the equipment? Will past or retired members in good standing be allowed to use the equipment? Will immediate family members be allowed to use the equipment? For agencies with duty crews, will the equipment only be used when the responders are on duty? Will the equipment be under lock and key and only used during specified hours, or will it be accessible 24/7/365? Will entry and exit be tracked with key fobs or a paper logbook? For career departments, work with union representatives to establish rules for use.
5. Create a written policy and rules for the use of the equipment. Post rules in the fitness area or room. Include contact information for medical emergencies, and if equipment is found to be defective or damaged. Your loss control consultant can assist.
6. Train users of the equipment. Injuries have occurred when using the equipment, misusing it, or exceeding the user's capabilities. Help your responders make good decisions when using the equipment. Consider employing a trainer from a local gym to train users. Trainers can also set up programs to vary the exercises and include some fun. Enjoyable exercise or exercise with a friend is more likely to become habitual.

7. Unless the users are full-time employees who receive annual department physical evaluations and will be using the equipment during their shift, the Safety Director recommends that voluntary users sign a written *Use of Gym Agreement*. The Agreement should include the following at a minimum:

- a. The user must acknowledge that the use of the exercise room is strictly voluntary, and the facility is to be used on their own time.
- b. The user should acknowledge that the facility is “unsupervised.”
- c. By signing the Agreement, users certify that they are in good physical health and do not suffer from any medical conditions that would preclude using the facility and equipment. Users agree to notify the designated agency representative immediately if their medical condition changes and discontinue the use of the equipment accordingly.
- d. Users will hold the agency harmless from any liability resulting from the use of the gym area and the equipment located in the gym.
- e. Users will follow all rules and are permitted to use the gym during posted hours only. They will not allow unauthorized persons to use the facility. They will adhere to equipment cleaning and disinfecting procedures.
- f. Employees will notify the agency immediately of any broken equipment or unsafe conditions they see.

Consult with your agency’s attorney and include other provisions they recommend. A sample agreement is available on the [MSI Forms and Documents](#) webpage.

8. Depending on the proximity of the equipment to the apparatus, consider whether an automated external defibrillator and first aid equipment should be provided in the exercise area.

Providing employees with a facility and equipment to promote a healthier lifestyle is an asset to the fire or EMS agency and its responders. However, it is important to ensure you protect your agency and its users in doing so.