

PHYSICAL COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT (PCA)



The role of the Hazardous Area Response Team Paramedic is new and is therefore being carefully developed and evaluated. In these new roles Paramedics are required to operate alongside their Fire and Rescue, and Police counterparts within the inner cordon of hazardous incidents. It is recognised that for Paramedics to perform their normal medical duties within these environments, wearing high levels of Personal Protective Equipment, the physical demands and stress of their role will be substantially increased. Ensuring there is a match between the capabilities of the Paramedic and the physical demands of the HART-IRU and USAR roles - by developing and implementing physical selection criteria – will help to optimise safe operating procedures for the workforce, while ensuring a minimum standard of operational effectiveness.

If at any stage in any and all of the following exercises, the supervising instructors think that a candidate is experiencing difficulty, distress or discomfort they will intervene and may instruct the candidate to end the exercise.

The PCA standard has been designed and set by a multi-disciplinary panel of subject matter experts, facilitated by Optimal Performance Ltd who have extensive experience in this field. The exercises simulate a cross-section of realistic key tasks and sub-tasks expected of the role. An authentic trial circuit was conducted under strict conditions with a group of volunteers; the results of which have set the standard of performance for selection to the role. The standards have subsequently been reviewed following use of the PCA in recruitment for London AS and Yorkshire AS, and have been revised accordingly. The standard will be subject to ongoing evaluation and validation.

Reference: Review of Physical Selection Tests and Standards for Ambulance Personnel Operating in Hazardous Area Response Teams (HART) – Optimal Performance Ltd. 24 September 2007



TEST:
Circuit

DETAILS:

- Distance = 1200 m.
- Weight carried = 35 kg.
- Initial stair climb of one flight of stairs (15 steps)
- 9 circuits, including one flight of stairs (15 steps), duck under (1.5 m), step over (42 and 58 cm) and walk between 2 benches (31 cm apart) per circuit.
- Dummy drag at end of 9 circuits (75 kg, 15 m around 3 cones).
- Manual dexterity.

STANDARD:

Maximum 24 minutes.

- Candidates completing the circuit between 24 and 25 minutes, might be permitted to enter training, as risk candidates. The decision to allow these candidates into training would be left with the facilitators once they had conducted the next round of testing and had evidence of the distribution of scores.

Criteria for failure:

- If the candidate is deemed unsafe to continue by the safety staff
 - Self withdrawal
 - The candidate is not able to finish within the time limit
- Failure to stand up at the end of the manual dexterity task

CORE TASKS:

- This test reflects (partially) the physical demands of a reasonable worst case scenario – e.g. walking 3.2 km in an underground tunnel to rescue casualties; wearing EDDBA and Gas Tight Suit, with obstacles to navigate.
- The manual dexterity reflects the ability to perform fine motor skills when tired and stressed (eg. triage and treatment once the casualty was reached, following penetration into the cordon area to the incident), whilst wearing PPE.





TEST:

Enclosed Space

DETAILS:

- Distance = 80 m.
- Negotiate at least 6 obstacles including small apertures, enclosed tunnels and triangle shapes to climb through.
- The candidate uses their head torch to half way point, when the light must be turned off and the candidate must retrace their route to the start.

STANDARD:

- Maximum 12 minutes.

CORE TASKS:

- This test reflects the ability to work in dark, enclosed spaces.



TEST:

Ladder Climb and Descent

DETAILS:

- Climb 13.5 m ladder to the fourth floor.
- No specified size for the aperture to climb through.
- Descend a rope from the third floor.
- Perform confidence test half way down.

STANDARD:

- No time limit but candidates are scored on a three point scale;
0 = fail
1 = pass but lacked confidence
2 = passed with confidence.

CORE TASKS:

- This test assesses the candidates' ability to work at height.

