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LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT



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FIRE CHIEF

April 23, 2013

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FILE NO. 13-058

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners
FROM: Brian L. Cummings, Fire Chief 
SUBJECT: ADDRESSING WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

FOR INFORMATION ONLY:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

For Information Only

The Professional Standards Division (PSD) investigates hundreds of complaints every year and investigations can often take up to a year to complete. In cases where there is an allegation of hazing, harassment, discrimination, or workplace violence, it is imperative that the Department promptly address the underlying issues that may have led to the complaint. Such action need not have to wait for a final disposition by PSD, and can be initiated separate and apart from the investigation. However, the Department must proceed carefully to preserve the integrity of the investigative process, as well the due process rights of parties to the complaint. Therefore, the Department's actions in this regard are not disciplinary, rather conflict resolution.

The complaints submitted to the Department are often based in events that long precede the reported act at issue. To tackle the root causes, the Department must look to fundamental changes in culture and attitude of its members. To that end, the Department will be adopting programs that will place a greater emphasis on character and leadership from the time that the newest members enter the Recruit Training Academy. As well, the Department will incorporate additional educational programs for current members, with incentives for those who hope to promote within the Department to participate. While these long term programs are implemented, the Department has renewed its commitment to tackle conflicts and problems in the work environment using training and mediation tools.

COURSES OF ACTION

Resolving Present Conflicts

Once a complaint is entered into the Complaint Tracking System (CTS), the PSD Commander reviews the submission for an initial determination regarding the nature of the complaint. Currently, the policy is for PSD to contact the Risk Management Section (RMS) only if there is an allegation of workplace violence or likelihood of litigation. This policy is in the process of being amended so that RMS is notified of all complaints involving a workplace environment issue.

Most recently, the Department has undertaken a review of members who have been temporarily displaced due to concerns about the work environment. Rather than wait until the final disposition of PSD, the Department has taken the approach that, absent extenuating circumstances, members should not be detailed from their assignments for extended periods as a way to resolve workplace conflicts. To that end, the Department is developing a program to deal with these situations where personal conflicts have interfered with Department operations. In the interim, the Department has an ad hoc group represented by RMS and the Emergency Services Bureau to reintegrate displaced members. In an effort to ameliorate the problems that led to the members being removed from their assignment, the Department is taking the following steps:

- Members in conflict are counseled individually and jointly. Members are asked to express their concerns as well as their proposed solutions to find common ground. Most importantly, members are reminded of their professional responsibilities and their duty to act in accordance with the Department's Code of Conduct, regardless of their personal feelings for another.
- Other members at the affected assignment on all shifts are also counseled since the group dynamic can often have a significant impact on the relationship of the individual members who are in conflict, or vice versa. In addition to counseling, all members are reminded of the Department's zero tolerance policy on hazing.
- Members are provided a direct line of communication with supervisors so that all parties know to whom to reach out for guidance.
- Members are provided EEO training, as well as team-building exercises to foster improved relations. This type of training helps members identify problems at the onset rather than wait until it is too late and teaches them how to recognize micro-inequities that can lead to much bigger problems if not addressed.
- Active involvement and increased monitoring from the chain of command well beyond the initial time of the members' return to promote early intervention.

Training and Education to Prevent Future Conflicts

The actions noted above deal with workplace conflict that are happening right now throughout the Department. This considerable expenditure of time and resources would be for naught if the Department did not address these issues with a long view. So many of the conflicts that arise are based in attitudes that have been set in place for decades and require nothing short of a complete shift in organizational culture. The best place to start is obviously with the newest members. From there, the Department must emphasize professional development throughout a member's career, from recruitment to retirement.

For the first time in Department history, the upcoming Recruit Training Academy for the next set of recruits will place a strong emphasis on leadership and character by implementing the "L-Series," a leadership training course developed by Mission-Center Solutions. Core classes in group dynamics will be presented at the beginning of the academy as a foundation, and then elements of the series will be incorporated throughout all elements of the training. There will be situational training during the entire term of the academy that will train recruits in the decision-making process, group cohesion, ethics, and integrity. In addition, the recruits will participate in the Deputy Leadership Initiative (DLI) program developed by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department which focuses on leadership on a personal level.

When problems do arise, a supervisor who is well-trained in personnel management and conflict resolution is the first line of defense against an escalation of the conflict. Therefore, it is imperative that those in the Captain rank have the necessary training. For those who are currently in that rank, these Captains have not had the benefit of the extended training in leadership that will be offered to new members going forward. While Captains currently undergo quarterly training, most of the emphasis has been on operational performance until now. The Training and Support Bureau (TSB) will be recommending DLI training for all Captains and Officers. Also, TSB will be issuing monthly or quarterly vignettes on personnel and ethics issues for Captains to discuss with their crews so that the training can be filtered down.

Another excellent educational opportunity offered by the Department is the Leadership Academy. This is a highly-regarded curriculum in behavioral science developed at West Point which teaches a "leader problem solving model through the use of twenty-seven behavioral theories." The Leadership Academy is voluntary, paid for by the Department but attended on the members' own time over a four-month period. Since it is voluntary, the Department is considering various incentives for members to participate, especially those who aspire to move up to a supervisory rank. For example, a member who successfully completes the Leadership Academy may be granted extra points on a promotional exam.

The new emphasis on leadership and ethics is an exciting turn for the Department. In order to gauge its impact on the members, the Department must measure its effectiveness. The means by which to do this include before and after surveys of CTS complaints, EEO claims, personal surveys, and other measurements tools – with a close eye on the upcoming recruit class to monitor their involvement in discipline and workplace conflicts. The results may not be immediate, and indeed cultural changes can take a full generation to set; however the Department must remain steadfast in its commitment to long-term education and training.

Board report prepared by Jenny Park, Risk Manager.