



# **INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT ON CAREER FIREFIGHTER/EMT COMPLAINTS**

**April 2, 2021**

**Ernest Harvin, CIA  
Internal Auditor  
Doña Ana County**

Mr. Macias,

You presented the internal auditor with an anonymous letter that was written “on behalf of the Doña Ana County Career Staff.” This was a letter of “No Confidence,” alleging that “all career staff came together,” resulting in the following consensus:

- The use of the Chain of Command (COC) [at the Fire Administration] is ineffective when attempting to acquire certain hands-on training. Repeated attempts to make contact with the Fire Administration’s Training Officer have been unsuccessful.
- Repeated requests for Live-Fire training over the years have gone unheeded. As a result of the COVID-19 Virus, we were informed that we would not be allowed to receive Live-Fire training. However the Fire Administration has hosted an academy that included this training [for volunteer staff] since the virus outbreak.  
A bias exists at the Fire Administration, as Live-Fire as well as other hands-on training is offered and administered to volunteers but not to career staff.
- Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) sometimes field incident calls without medications, hoping they will not be needed to save someone’s life.

This report is intended for the Executive Leadership of Doña Ana County, and addresses the areas of concern above within the County’s Fire & Emergency Services Department. The internal auditor acknowledges the participation received during this inquiry from Fire & Emergency Services Department personnel.

## **PROCESS**

The following documents were reviewed:

DAC & International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 5037 06-26-2018.” Herein, Article 9 – Grievance Procedure  
Kramer & Associates Analysis of Fire Department Facilities and Operations (Module 7)  
HR Policies & Procedures updated 11-12-2019,” noting the following applicable sections of data:

- 1-4. Employee and Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities
- 2-12. Reports of Misconduct or Wrongdoing
- Article 19.2 Emergency Medical Services/Fire Training

The following staff were interviewed:

Fire Administration: Fire Chief  
Fire Administration: Deputy Fire Chief  
Fire Administration: Training Officer  
Fire Station 1 – Anthony: 3 x LTs; 6 x Staff  
Fire Station 2 – Doña Ana: 3 x LTs; 7 x Staff  
Fire Station 3 – NMSU: 1 x Deputy Station Chief; 1 x Volunteer Battalion Chief (VBC)  
Legal: Deputy County Attorney

For the purposes of this report, paid firefighters and emergency medical technicians located at fire stations 1-3 are referred to as career staff.

## SUMMARY

The Audit resulted in a dichotomy of viewpoints that is in part the result of a lack of written policy. In particular, career staff views the COC as lacking in responsiveness whereas the Fire Administration purports open lines of communication. Acquiring hands-on training is viewed as an extremely tedious, hit-or-miss process by career staff, but the Fire Administration indicates the existence of clearly defined steps to acquire such training. The largest concerns for the timely restocking of medication were at the fire station that is farthest away from the Fire Administration, as restocking was purported to take longer. The particular findings of this inquiry are listed below in the Results & Analysis section, which lists direct quotes and paraphrases received during in-person interviews with both Career and Fire Administration staff (*Management Input is italicized*).

## RESULTS & ANALYSIS

### 1. **Condition in Question:** Chain of Command

Is the Fire Administration responsive when contacted about acquiring training?

Career Staff: A response may be received within 1 – 2 weeks, if received at all.

Training Officer: I will normally get back to those who attempt to contact me, within a week.

Deputy Fire Chief: Normally, I will get back to fire stations within the hour.

**Analysis:** When asked about the process to acquire training, career staff responses were inconsistent. The number of direct reports for the Deputy Fire Chief, as well as the volume of training requests for the Training Officer can allow for missed communications if proper protocol is not in place.

**Recommendation:** The Audit recommends the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that establish the following protocol -

- Create a form (preferably in digital format) for fire station leadership to fill out when making training requests of the Training Officer.
  - Type of training desired
  - Names and employee IDs of staff to receive the training
  - Total overtime or per diem needed for the training
  - And other particulars (dates, timeframes, etc.) as necessary
- Institute a monthly deadline for submitting training requests.
- The Training Officer should review the requests for completeness and follow up as necessary before partaking in a monthly meeting with the Deputy Fire Chief, to discuss and acquire approval for training requests.
- Establish a monthly date wherein the Training Officer responds to training requests, informing fire station leadership of dis/approved training.

**Manager Response:** *There is a need for DACFES to develop a training Standard Operating Guideline (SOG). The SOG will cover the annual training requirements (fire and EMS), how to request a specific training topic, and the use of an annual training calendar.*

*The SOG will address the use of the Target Solutions online training platform and the process that station officers will use to document training.*

*The SOG will be completed July 31<sup>st</sup> 2021 followed by a two-week training period. After which time, the SOG will become effective.*

**Auditor Comments:** This recommendation proposes the use of technology to assist with training requests. However, if a span of control challenge remains after implementing the above recommendations or any recommendation herein, the Audit refers the Fire Administration to a 2020 Kramer & Associates analysis that recommends an immediate need for improvements in staffing by establishing 24/7 Captain or Battalion Chief positions.

2. **Condition in Question:** Live-Fire Training

Have you requested, received or been offered Live-Fire training as a refresher, by the Fire Administration over the past three years?

Career Staff: It has been years since we received this training, as it is mainly for volunteers and career staff is not invited; only one of us has received this refresher training within the past 3 years; we have requested it in the past.

Training Officer: I have not been made aware of Live-Fire training requests by career staff within the past 2 -3 years.

Deputy Fire Chief: I am aware of requests for this training, which should be coordinated through the Training Officer.

**Analysis:** Live-Fire training is highly desired amongst career staff, and the training carries with it the sharpening of core skills. A sample of Live-Fire training requests (July – December, 2019) revealed –

Live-Fire **training requests submitted** by Fire Stations (1&2): None reported.

Live-Fire **training received** by Fire Stations (1&2): Two staff members received the training within the last 3 years.

Live-Fire **training requests received** by the Training Officer: None.

Live-Fire **trainings administered** since COVID pandemic, by the Training Officer: Seven Sessions (No career staff received the training).

**Recommendation:** Extra capacity of training events at the Fire Administration is not made known to career staff. The Audit recommends the use of a digital training calendar for posting training events, which could serve not only as a one-stop alternative to inform all staff of trainings being administered, but also leave an audit trail of what trainings were offered as well as who signed up for the trainings (See Recommendation for #3 below).

**Manager Response:** *See Managers Response to Condition #1.*

**Auditor Comments:** Training received by career staff but not administered by the Training Officer should be recorded and passed on to the Training Officer.

3. **Condition in Question:** Hands-On or Online Training offered by/via the Fire Administration  
Have you received hands-on training notifications from, or been offered hands-on training by the Fire Administration?

Career Staff: Notice of [hands-on] training may be received via email within the same week that it is occurring or even after the training has occurred; We are not sure if Fire Fighter training is online in Target Solutions.

Training Officer: I sent out 6-7 emails monthly to alert staff of available [hands-on] training opportunities; Target Solutions is an online training tool that has a training library, training manual, and it tracks training that is taken by staff.

**Analysis:** Hands-on training opportunities sent via email by the Training Officer are either not received or not read in a timely manner by career staff. Some training modules in the on-line training library are empty; some staff purport limited access to on-line training modules.

Hands-on **training requests submitted** by Fire Stations (1&2): One.

Hands-on **training received** by Fire Stations (1&2), from the Training Officer: None reported.

Hands-on **training requests received** by the Training Officer: None.

Hands-on **training offers made** by/via the Training Officer: 15 (1 career staff member attended a training).

**Recommendation:** Target Solutions is a system utilized only for training, to which all staff have access. It has a calendar that could be used on which training events could be posted, allowing for individuals to sign up for specific training events. As each separate event would have a limited number of open slots and occur at different times -

- Individuals could access the calendar to learn of and sign up for training that will be occurring.
  - This would incentivize all staff to open and become more familiar with Target Solutions.
  - This would eliminate the missed training notifications (via emails).
  - Individual fire stations could utilize the calendar to post their local training events, alerting other stations that may be interested in joint training exercises.
  - Calendar notices of upcoming training could be combined with solicitation for volunteers to cover the shifts of career staff, using the Stipend Program as an incentive.

It was stated by career staff that all do not have equal access to online trainings. However, the Fire Administration has paid for licensed access for career staff. If access is available, this should be communicated to the staff.

The internal auditor reviewed some of the digital training modules available to career staff (Stations 1 & 2) noting that many were empty training shells.

- Fire Administration leadership should give the Training Officer guidance on the appropriate level of access for fire station leadership, and make career staff aware of this access.
- The Training Officer should consider acquiring training modules/programs that are already complete versus endeavoring to write each module needed for the Target Solutions training software.

**Manager Response:** *The Target Solutions platform will be addressed in the Training SOG. Access to the platform will be standardized with members given access to the platform's helpdesk.*

4. **Condition in Question:** Medication Resupply

Do you have the required medication needed when you answer EMT incident calls?

Career Staff: We answer calls with the proper medication, but medication resupply can be a challenge after hours or on weekends.

Training Officer: The normal time it takes to resupply a fire station is 24-48 hours; if I am unavailable, staff can reach out to the Deputy Fire Chief for medication.

Deputy Fire Chief: Over the weekend, career staff may contact the Training Officer or myself to receive needed medication.

**Analysis:** The Audit did not find evidence to substantiate the claim that EMTs sometimes field incident calls without medications, however disparities were noted in medication replacement timeframes. Staff is aware of the medication supply process but the internal auditor found no department SOP outlining the procedure.

**Recommendation:** The Audit recommends the development of properly written and widely distributed department-level SOP that details the process for

- 1) requesting medication resupplies,
- 2) requiring bi-monthly checks of medication expiration dates [by fire stations],
- 3) medication replacement timelines (so fire stations know when to expect resupplies),
- 4) allowing access to buildings so that personnel can deliver medications when staff is away on incident calls, and
- 5) the necessary steps to receive medication resupplies during Fire Administration after- and non-duty hours.

**Manager Response:** *There is a need for DACFES to develop a medication Standard Operating Policy. The Standard Operating Policy will cover inventory control at fire administration, at the fire stations, inventory ordering, procedures for damaged or missing medications, medication storage, and the procedures for expiring medication and tracking medication.*

*The Standard Operating Policy will be completed by July 31, 2021 followed by a two-week training period. After which time, the Standard Operating Policy will become effective.*

  
Ernest Harvin, Internal Auditor, Doña Ana County