



MANAGEMENT LETTER of AUDIT OBSERVATIONS

Career Firefighter/EMT Complaints

April 2, 2021

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An inquiry was made into complaints listed in an anonymous letter concerning the Fire & Emergency Services Department. The internal auditor noted the following areas as secondary or tertiary to the original inquiry, however the Fire Administration may benefit from the data acquired.

- The Audit notes a recommendation from career staff that appears to have merit from an efficiency improvement standpoint. The recommendation is as follows: Allow only one Fire Engine per fire station, and stage two back-up fire engines at the Fire Administration (for access by all). This would cut back on the upkeep (to include insurance and registration costs) of extra fire engines that often go unused, as many fire stations have at least two fire engines in inventory.
- The internal auditor learned that the Mesilla Valley Regional Dispatch Authority (MVRDA) has not been given an Operations or Deployment Dispatch Policy. Such a policy would allow the MVRDA dispatcher to direct the quantity and types of vehicles needed in response to incident calls, reducing the inefficiency of a fire station sending too many units or not sending the most suitable unit to address an emergency/situation.
- A recommendation from the field suggests that on at least a quarterly basis, career staff remains on duty for 4 hours after their shift to attend hands-on training, or come in 4 hours before the start of their shift to attend hands-on training. If this is conducted on a rotational basis, 1) all three shifts would be able to acquire the preferred hands-on training, 2) career staff could acquire the annual training desired to maintain a strong ISO

rating, and 3) the County would still have incident coverage by career staff.

- Firefighters at fire stations 1 & 2 expressed apprehension about facing a possible hazmat situation. A brief risk assessment revealed that DAC hazmat risks originate from the two interstates that crisscross Doña Ana County, railway trains that intersect the city of Las Cruces, underground gas lines, and fertilizer stockpiles. The Fire Administration may consider in-house, hands-on HAZMAT vehicle familiarization and equipment calibration training to keep crews confident and familiar with available tools and techniques.
- The internal auditor reviewed some of the digital training modules available to career staff (Stations 1 & 2) noting that many were empty training shells. The internal auditor also reviewed a low-cost, robust training program (Jones & Bartlett) at Fire Station 3 (NMSU). While the internal auditor neither endorses nor refutes any particular training program desired by the Fire Administration, the Training Officer may consider reviewing training modules/programs that are already complete versus endeavoring to write each module needed for the Target Solutions training software.
- Career staff concurred that Volunteer Battalion Chiefs (VBCs) should be in charge of incident command in circumstances wherein career staff skills are needed for more immediate tasks. Although the development of VBC positions was intended to provide additional resources, relations between career staff and the VBCs are ‘strained.’ As neither the Fire Administration Captains nor the VBCs have direct authority to supervise career staff in their daily operations, the Fire Administration would benefit from developing clearly written delineations of duty so that all understand lines of authority.
- Some staff pointed out the lack of uniformity of medical supply bags. While uniformity of medication may not be plausible due to differing licensure levels, medical bags could be made uniform. The Audit realizes that during emergencies EMTs may utilize medication from ambulances, which would not necessarily match DAC’s medical bags. Thus, medical supply bag uniformity is a management consideration and the Audit makes a recommendation neither for nor against it.
- The Audit found a consensus amongst career staff who agreed that the Fire Administration put out timely COVID related guidance, via emails and WEBEX staff meetings.
- The Fire Administration purported and career staff consistently affirmed that staff is reimbursed for EMT continuing education that is acquired from external sources.