
Section: 1.7 Citizen/Public Complaints

Effective Date: 07/01/2007

Revision Date: 04/25/2007

Approved by: J. Ehret 04/25/2007

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all South Metro Fire Department personnel.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this guideline is to outline a procedure for processing concerns or complaints from citizens or the general public regarding Fire Department members and/or services.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

All South Metro Fire Department members will respond to the public in a courteous, caring and appropriate manner. All citizen concerns and/or complaints regarding Fire Department members and/or services will be addressed in a prompt, courteous, and positive manner.

Citizen complaints and/or concerns range from individual performance or nonperformance to the overall level of service delivery provided. Management and supervisory personnel will attempt to service and resolve complaints at the lowest appropriate level in the Department.

All complaints, including those from citizens wishing to remain anonymous, will be documented. The documentation will be as complete as possible. The completed documentation will be forwarded to the Assistant Chief for investigation.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY FIRE ADMINISTRATION:

Citizen complaints received in the Fire Department Administration Office will be directed to the Assistant Chief. A Complaint Record will be initiated and the complaint assigned to the appropriate Division/section for investigation.

All complaints alleging serious administrative or criminal misconduct will be assigned to the Fire Chief.

Normally, service delivery complaints will be assigned to the appropriate Division/Section for action. Complaints related to Operations personnel will be forwarded to the Assistant Chief for investigation.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY OTHER DIVISIONS OF THE FIRE DEPARTMENT:

Citizen complaints will be documented by the person receiving the complaint. If a complaint pertains to serious misconduct, the Captain will be notified immediately. The completed Complaint Record will be forwarded immediately to the Captain so it can be recorded and assigned to the appropriate person for investigation.

INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS:

Each complaint received by the Department will be investigated thoroughly and promptly. Regardless of severity, each complaint should be regarded as an opportunity to examine our customer service at the point of contact.

Unless the complainant request “**no contact**” the investigating officer should contact the complainant as soon as possible to inform the complainant that their concern is being addressed. Upon contact, the following steps should be performed:

- Inform the complainant of your name and rank and how you relate to the area of concern.
- Restate the complaint as you understand it.
- Ask if your understanding of the complaint is correct.
- Reconcile any discrepancies.
- Ask complainant if they would like you to contact them when investigation is complete.
- **THANK THE COMPLAINANT FOR BRINGING THE CONCERNS TO YOUR ATTENTION.**
- Interview the individual/crew that the complaint was lodged against, and document the results.
- Investigations conducted by the second level of supervision or above, advise members of the right to Union representation.
- Discuss the call/incident that generated the complaint.
- Ask if anything unusual occurred.
- Describe the incident as related by the complainant.
- Discuss any discrepancies.

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DISPOSITION:

After considering all available information, the investigating officer will make one of the following findings.

- UNFOUNDED The alleged act did not occur.
- EXONERATED The act occurred but was justified, lawful and proper.
- NOT SUSTAINED The investigation produced information insufficient to prove or disapprove the allegation.
- SUSTAINED All or part of the act occurred as alleged. (A finding of "SUSTAINED" must be based on the existence of substantial fact in support of reasonable proof.)

DOCUMENTATION:

The investigator will provide written documentation of his actions, stating the facts that include the statement/s of the individual/crew. In some cases the investigator will need to obtain written statement/s from the individual/crew, which will be attached to the Complaint Record.

FOLLOWUP:

After the investigator has determined the appropriate "finding," a meeting should be held with the crew/individual named in the complaint, along with the shift representative, if requested. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the finding and any pertinent information. If corrective action is required, it will be outlined at this time. Many complaints will fall in the "**NOT SUSTAINED**" and "**EXONERATED**" category. These incidents should be thoroughly examined from a customer service point of view. The focus of the discussion concerning these incidents should be on how future encounters of a similar nature might be handled to avoid creating unhappy customers.

If the complainant requested follow-up, the investigator should thank them for sharing their concerns and advise them that the complaint was investigated and proper action was taken.

THE COMPLETED COMPLAINT RECORD AND ALL ATTACHMENTS WILL BE FORWARDED TO THE FIRE CHIEF.

BOARD LIAISON AND FOLLOWUP:

The Fire Chief will act as a liaison to the Board and City Administrator/Managers in responding to inquiries regarding citizen complaints as may be necessary or appropriate.