BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR A DIVERSITY PLAN TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

June 1998

Abstract

The problem was that fire service agencies and the Ventura County Fire Protection District needed to assess the issue of workforce diversity and its benefits. Managers needed to realize that real diversity is much more than just articulating it.

The purpose of this research project was to identify obstacles and make recommendations to implement a successful diversity program within the Ventura County Fire Protection District. This study will also display cultural barriers between genders and ethnic groups.

This study utilized the action research methodology. The research questions to be answered were:

1. What pro-active actions has the Ventura County Fire Protection District undertaken to advance diversity within the department?
2. What have been the internal barriers to diversity programs within the Fire District?
3. What have been the external barriers to diversity issues external of the Fire District?
4. Is there really a true need to include diversity within the Fire District?
5. Who benefits from a diverse workforce?

The procedures utilized included a search and review of fire service journals, research papers, and magazines; personal interviews with National Fire Academy staff and field personnel; and a survey of selected fire departments.

The results of the research indicate that the Ventura County Fire Protection District and -other fire agencies surveyed needed to allocate more resources to the issue of diversity for successful programs. Diversity is more than merely saying the words, it must become a way of life within the department's day-to-day operations.

The research points out that the fire service may be sitting on a time bomb waiting to explode. The benefits of assessing the department's current diversity program and its future include:

1. Employees may be more productive because they are free to interact with peers without prejudices.
2. The customer service base is better served because employee realize hidden cultural differences.
3. Creating an employee pool that reflects the demographics of the community served.

The recommendation of the research was that diversity is more than just ethnic and gender differences, and it is management's responsibility and duty to bring about diversity's internal and external values to the organization and community.

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Introduction

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Background and Significance

The background of the diversity problem lies within the traditional environment of the modern day fire service and the Ventura County Fire Protection District (Fire District). The Fire District employment pool represents the demographics of the Ventura County population majority, white males. The internal demographics of the Fire District are consistent with its management ranks and the fire service as a whole.

When a Fire Chief speaks about diversity, little understanding is given to diversity's true meaning. The rank and file firefighters believe that they are being punished by attending diversity training and don't look at its advantages. An internal survey conducted within the Fire District displays that a majority of firefighters believe that diversity only pertains to ethic and gender issues. The fire service looks at diversity as the only way to avoid Federal consent decrees which highlights diversity as a stigma, not a benefit to the organization.

This study is designed to point out that diversity is truly needed within the workplace and it has a variety of internal and external advantages. It is hoped that some of these recommendations can be delivered to the employee workforce in such a way as to incite new cultural beliefs within the Fire District. Diversity should be embraced and used to enhance all operations.

This study was conducted as the final project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Executive Leadership course. Prior course work provides the ability to identify core issues written here, but it truly takes someone in a leadership role to instill new cultural values within the traditional fire service. The skills taught in the

Executive Leadership course provide the knowledge and tools to incite change, especially difficult cultural values.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to identify key findings of others who have tried to modify cultural values. Also, the literature review needed to clearly identify the issue, its background, and obstacles before recommendations could be made.

The literature review was included in a search of fire service, human relations, and public administration magazine articles; review of research papers from the National Fire Academy; review of books pertaining to organization management and human relations; personal interviews from Fire District field personnel; lecture information from professional speakers; and a review of literature from the California Lutheran University library.

Definition of Diversity

Chief Michael Bell (1997) reported on a conference held by the International Association of Fire Chiefs. A mixed member panel openly discussed diversity. They defined diversity as not just a fair playing ground. It is more about how we demonstrate our treatment of each other, acceptance of each other as individuals, and how our differences actually make our organization stronger.

Susan Brightmire (1995) wrote in Fire Engineering magazine about the early women and minorities in the fire service who changed themselves to be one of the guys so as not to be different, just so they could survive. Organizations have long maintained an

atmosphere that rejected individuals outside of the norm which has caused the minority employment pool to become subservient. She goes on to say that individuals should celebrate their differences, and that top management should pull employee groups together for common goods.

Barriers and Legal Mandates

One of the considerations to an effective diversity plan is to be prepared for barriers, both internal and external. Acknowledgment of these obstacles will create options for successful implementation. James Q. Wilson (1998) wrote about the effects of California's voter initiative, Proposition 209, that bans preferences for racial and ethnicity. Critics charge that this initiative eliminates affirmative action and minorities will be discriminated once again. Proponents say that minorities will be judged on their own merits and doing so will remove artificial assumptions that minorities only get higher jobs due to race.

Mona Kormberg (1991) states that a critical factor of successful diversity rests with integration of women and minorities recruits that are seen as meeting the same high standards as everyone else.

George Simons (1997) wrote in the Managing Diversity newsletter about two barriers: actual physical characteristics of a person and how one dresses; and how one makes up or comports oneself. Physical characteristics of people are judged by groups and they are usually without recourse. Industry trends with cosmetic surgery indicate that this historical female option has an increasing amount of male clients now. He also raises an interesting viewpoint, that a person's dress attire varies with the group they are dealing

with. Groups adopt social norms for dress attire and that individuals must become "cross cultural" when traversing from one distinct group to another.

Joseph Kahn (1997) wrote an article in the Boston Globe titled "Under Fire." This article describes women firefighters' uphill battle to achieve an equal playing field in the Boston Fire Department. It points out that the fire service isn't proactive, it's reactive. It also talks about the low number of employed women firefighters as being attributed to the low number of entry level candidates because women can't find mentors, role models, and heroes.

In August 1979, the U. S. Fire Administration under the direction of Olin L. Greene, convened a "Women in the Fire Service" seminar. The seminar resulted in the U. S. Fire Administration publishing the January 1993 "A Handbook on Women in Firefighting." This document discussed: barriers of hostility and opposition from male co-workers; peer support groups; and equal standards for recruitment and promotions. As a follow-up to this publication, Superintendent Dennis O'Nieal of the National Fire Academy was asked this question on October 1, 1997, during the Superintendent's luncheon: "why hasn't there been a follow up publication to the 1993 symposium as suggested?" Superintendent O'Nieal replied: "there is no follow-up planned as this is a local issue."

Jamieson and O'Mara (1991) identified that managers who work with people of different backgrounds are likely to be hampered by education, linguistic, and communication issues as well as insensitivity and ignorance of each other's motivation. Managers must look at ways to integrate the increasing number of mixed cultures into the workplace.

Cultural Issues in the Community

Linda Honeycutt (1997) writes in the Journal of Emergency Medicine that most emergency service workers receive little or no training in cultural values of the communities they serve. She cites several examples of how ordinary everyday actions of emergency service providers may be misunderstood or offensive to different cultures.

The Ventura County Fire Protection District conducted a painstaking process in 1992 under the facilitation of Ken Hawkins and Dan Bay Associates. This process used varied special interest groups to identify historical diversity obstacles and cultural needs. The Hispanic Firefighter group identified the need for Hispanic families to spend time together due to cultural beliefs. Further discussion pointed out issues of residential overcrowding and vehicle overcrowding and how these two items were directly attributed to Hispanic family cultural beliefs. The Black Firefighter group talked about the hidden barriers of the Boy Scout programs to minority groups and gay/lesbian beliefs. The Fire District held a meeting with Ms. Leilani Bueltmann, who is a Senior Exploring Executive, on April, 1998, to further discuss the Boy Scouts objections to gays. She stated: “gays will not be allowed to be explorer leaders if the Boy Scouts organization knows about it.”

Methods to Improve Diversity

Chief Michael Bell (1997) states in the IAFC On-Scene that Leadership on diversity issues should start from the top of the organization.

Knutson and Noce (1992) wrote: ”the Mesa Fire Department in Arizona adopted their affirmative action plan to represent a city workforce that is the mirror image of the

community it serves." They agreed to a three-tiered plan that would be open to everyone; not impose quotas; and not reduce standards. A pro-active outreach recruitment plan was developed to foster interest in the fire department. The Mesa Fire Department is also joining forces with the local community college to begin pre-fire technology courses and bilingual education for firefighters.

Annette Strauss (1992) wrote in the Public Management magazine that ambiguity must be mastered at the same time as diversity. "Ambiguity arises because there are no easy answers to problems of race and ethnic relations, yet we, as leaders are sometimes pressed to find easy answers." Ambiguity leads to differential treatment so leaders must strive toward consistency and objectivity in forming policies.

Mona Kornberg (1991) writes in the International Fire Service Training Association newsletter that diversity requires major organizational change which must come from top management. She states that "successful programs go beyond numerical targets and address issues of integration and retention."

Gardenswartz and Rowe (1997) agree that getting executive level support is key for diversity success in any organization. They talked about three elements. First, you must suit your approach to the culture and character of the organization. This means that the education method must fit within the socially accepted norms of the organization so diversity as a word does not become a stigma. Second, another key element in generating support for diversity is to expand the executive's view of what it really is. Studies show that 89% of the people surveyed believe that diversity is only race and gender issues. Individual aspects such as religion, educations, parental status, and work

position need to be considered if the diversity initiative is to create a truly inclusive work environment. Third, executives need to review the existing strategic plan and the organization mission and value, then connect them to diversity, both from an internal staff management position and an external sales and customer service orientation.

Robert Ingram (1997) speaks about executive level managers must “walk the talk” in our actions. When discussing diversity, but only offering the discussion to a majority working class, true diversity is hidden. In this case, executive managers should invite a cross section of its working class and ensure that the discussion environment presents a welcome atmosphere.

During the California State Joint Apprenticeship Committee meeting in 1997, Ms. Angela Oh talked about changing diversity. She stated: “people won’t change until they have a need to change in their heart.” She said that managers need to try and personalize the need for diversity issues and how these changes can benefit individuals.

Procedures

The action research methodology was used to study the issue of diversity and how to build a foundation plan. The research questions to be answered were:

1. What pro-active actions has the Ventura County Fire Protection District undertaken to advance diversity within the department?
2. What have been the internal barriers to diversity programs within the Fire District?
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Final recommendations were based from the following issues:

1. This study dictated that a clear understanding of diversity issues within the fire service and the Fire District's past be understood as a basic foundation. Understanding history is not only used to prevent repeating mistakes, but to understand barriers to implement recommendations.
2. A thorough knowledge of legal mandates and barriers to diversity was needed to ensure legitimate recommendation options.
3. Studies need to be conducted within the service community to understand cultural values. This understanding then needs to be incorporated with service delivery methods.
4. Evaluations need to be performed based upon research to identify steps to

establish a diversity plan foundation.

Collection of Data

To accomplish these objectives, research was conducted between October 1997 and May 1998 using several methods. A literature research was conducted by studying research papers submitted through the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. This research was conducted to evaluate different diversity models being performed across the nation and evaluate their effect upon the Fire District. Notes were reviewed from past managerial studies and lectures attended to identify specific issues to the Fire District. A comprehensive literature review of diversity issues and managerial practices was undertaken to evaluate the latest trends in today's and the future ever-changing workforce.

A survey was sent out to selected comparable demographic fire departments (30 sent out and 21 returned) to determine similar concerns/issues and study new working diversity models. The comparable size of the survey was relative to areas served, population served, budget size, amount of management staff, department size and ethnic/gender demographics. This same questionnaire was given out to 18 Fire District managers to gauge an internal perspective and all were returned. A copy of the questionnaire and results are contained in Appendix A.

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that the final results of the study would be manageable, yet subject to employee and management staff buy-in. It was also assumed that respondents of the questionnaires were empowered to complete them with unbiased, truthful information.

The author of this report researched and analyzed all data/literature review and has presented the results in an objective manner. The author clearly assumes responsibility of the organization and the recognition that he must develop skills to foster better diversity relations.

A limiting factor in this study was the constraint of employee paradigms and some lack of honest openness to a changing workforce.

Results

Results were derived from using the action research methodology. The research questions to be answered were:

1. What pro-active actions has the Ventura County Fire Protection District undertaken to advance diversity within the department?
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The first research question was developed to identify if any proactive steps toward diversity have been undertaken by the Fire District and to compare these actions to models used within the fire service and private businesses. The results of the survey

question #5 by Fire District members indicate that 95% believe that the department was proactive in implementing its diversity program. A comparison was done between the initial diversity work performed by the outside consultants Ken Hawkins and Dan Bay (1992) for the Fire District and the models used in private business Farr (1992).

Analysis shows that the Fire District is comparable with private industry in addressing diversity with the existing workforce, but lags behind in the area of outreach recruitment. The survey results using data from external fire agencies indicate that the Fire District is nine percent more proactive. Further analysis indicates that the majority external survey pool was from outside of the Southern California area. Demographic information (Ward, 1995) reviewed shows that the Southern California area has a larger mixed ethnic population than the external survey pool. Women and minorities will comprise more than 75 percent of the entry-level labor force over the next ten years. It is in the self-interest of fire departments to develop strategies to compete for the best and brightest candidates from this culturally diverse labor pool (Kornberg, 1991).

An evaluation was made about the effectiveness of the diversity programs employed by the fire service in the survey questions #3 and 4. The majority of fire departments have recognized that they need to conduct on-going training. Results indicate that most agencies use outside consults with a combination of video and interactive discussions for the delivery medium. The interesting survey fact is that the diversity programs are only yielding a 10-15% effective rate.

The second research question was developed to identify internal barriers toward successful achievement of a Fire District diversity program. This question is essential to

establish key factors that need to be identified and overcome to achieve a effective diversity program. The survey first examined firefighters' attitudes toward diversity. The survey indicates that firefighters generally believe that diversity has a place within the fire service, but only 10-13% of firefighters actually promote diversity with 6-8% directly opposing diversity. The survey then measured top management's support of diversity programs. The survey resulted in the majority (71-76%) believing that management only articulated the diversity message while only 18-22% believed that top management highly supported the diversity message. Literature research has clearly shown that it is essential that top level managers must exemplify support for diversity programs (Edwards, 1993) (Brightmire, 1995).

Internal barriers were more clearly identified in survey questions #7 and 8. There is a majority impression that entry level standards have been lowered for entry level hiring and promotions. Research has shown that this survey may be true by the illusion and mistaken identity of testing standards (Cunningham, 1990). Over the past few years while diversity issues have been highlighted, so too have the validity of testing standards. Testing standards have come under attack due to their direct applicability to job functions versus the perceived belief of employment barriers to under represented work groups (Coleman, 1990). When asked to rate internal barriers, survey respondents indicated three majority barriers: prejudices (39-40%), peer pressure (14-20%), and organization culture (18-24%).

The third research question was developed to identify external barriers toward successful achievement of a Fire District diversity program. This survey question #9

presented a different result from the question about internal barriers. The results indicate that prejudices still lead the results (39-40%), but the secondary factor now becomes politics (30-31%). Literature research also indicates this difference by examining the lack of top level support for diversity programs in the business and at legislatures (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1997). A specific examples of legislative conflict is the Preposition 209 in California whereas the legislators and voters rejected affirmative action guidelines for university admissions (Wilson, 1998).

The fourth research question was developed to identify the need of a diversity program and to gauge its importance within the fire service community. This question begs the real issue if the fire service really understands what diversity is. Survey question #11 asks this question. The respondents acknowledged a majority in all areas which indicates a lack of understanding of diversity. Diversity tends to get confused with affirmative action, Equal Opportunity Employment, gender and minority issues (Carlton, 1997). The true issue of valuing our differences gets lost in the majority lack of understanding of diversity and its benefits (Bell, 1997).

The fifth research question was developed to identify the intrinsic value of a diversity plan. The survey represented a majority answer to this in question #10. This is further supported by literature research that shows that private industry must respond to the multicultural makeup of their individual communities (Strauss, 1992). The fire service must also recognize the value of diversity when delivering its services. Service delivery cannot be rendered the same to each community. Service delivery may not be as effective to one ethnic group as another and may be deemed offensive (Honeycutt, 1997).

Discussion

The findings of these results were comparable to the literature research in most areas. The interesting comparison was the survey results analyzing internal versus external survey results. There appears to be a heightened state of awareness of diversity issues internally, but similar results overall in all other areas. This project was intended to help identify key issues that need to be overcome in order to promote diversity within the Fire District. The data received has achieved the suggested outcome, but the questions still remains how to change an employee's pre-employment cultural values to meet society's ever changing demographics.

The literature research conducted was quite extensive and presented a wide range of issues to be considered. Clearly, the research has shown that the changing demographics of the Fire District will mandate the fire management needs to make diversity a high priority in its daily operation. The survey shows that the real challenge will be how to actually implement diversity values within the workforce, not just articulate it. The issue of diversity training remains a complex topic. Research indicates a variety of video based programs, but are these really effective? Interactive training was shown to be more effective in the survey, but it comes at a much higher cost to implement. Research did not indicate a clear cost/benefit risk profile toward implementing a diversity program.

Organizational implications of this study indicate that the Fire District must continue to persevere in the area of diversity issues. There is a clear relationship between educating personnel in diversity issues and working relationships and community service delivery. Proactive steps in diversity appear that they will pay dividends over time in increased

public support, fewer labor grievances, increased productivity and better working relationships.

This study created some unexpected findings whereas it appears that the Fire District may be well ahead of other fire agencies when addressing diversity issues. Another unexpected finding is that the National Fire Academy is not placing more of a priority of the issue of diversity and minority recruitment.

Recommendations

The purpose of this project was to examine the issue of diversity and how the Fire District could develop a foundation to better serve the community. Managers need to realize that real diversity is much more than just articulating it. The recommendation of the research was that diversity is more than just ethnic and gender differences, and it is management's responsibility and duty to bring about diversity's internal and external values to the organization and community.

Based on the research obtained through this project, the Fire District should perform the following items to achieve a higher state of diversity:

1. The first lesson learned is that major organizational change must be phased in over time and requires demonstrated commitment from all levels of the organization, particularly senior management. The fire chief needs to make key policy statements such as an Equal Employment Opportunity policy (Appendix B) that addresses discrimination, harassment and tolerance

levels. Also, the fire chief should make a policy statement that the organization will try to achieve a representation in its work force that mirrors the community served. Successful programs also need to go beyond numerical targets and address issues of integration and retention.

2. Involve key players in the planning implementation of the program. This needs to be a diverse group that has direct access to the fire chief. This group includes senior management who must personify what diversity is as an example to the employee group. This group can study the demographic cultures/ values and advise employees of alternate methods of service delivery to effectively serve that community.

3. Establish a viable diversity program that can be on-going to support itself. The program needs to be creditable and consistent to keep the message in the limelight. This program needs to be cost-effective so it can persevere in light of changing budget conditions.

4. Organization support for change needs to be established. Anticipating issues associated with change before program implementation will help alleviate fear and minimize stress. Identify how the organization arrived at its present situation to establish a baseline and to prevent history from repeating itself. Create a sales staff to educate employee groups about the benefits of diversity: community support, increased productivity, and better working relationships.

5. Train managers first before dealing with employees. This training should

include legal mandates, identify internal and external barriers to diversity, and strategies for dealing with changing employee situations.

6. Focus recruitment strategies to concentrate on attracting potentially qualified target groups. This specially pertains to an on-going outreach program, not just accepting what a test announcement delivers. The organization needs to budget funds to support outreach programs and staff needs to be persistent in its' effort.

7. Validate testing standards to ensure that they are applicable to job skills. The organization has a responsibility to establish valid test standards and not lower testing standards. Lowering standards not only affects overall morale, but also cast shadows over certain employee groups, creating secondary issues.

8. Monitor and evaluate organizational operations to establish diversity program's effectiveness. This step should be linked to the organization's strategic plan and should include individual follow-ups with selected employees.

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Appendix A

*** The questionnaire results are listed by outside department scores / then Fire District scores.**

Instructions: Please complete this survey to the best of your knowledge and return in the envelope provided. This survey is being conducted as part of my Executive Fire Officer's Program. Please check all answers that apply to your organization. If you have any additional comments, please list them on the back side of the questionnaire.

1. Do you believe that diversity has a place within the fire service?
   Yes **98/92%** No **2/4%**

2. How would you rate most firefighters' attitude toward diversity issues?
   Promote **10/13%** Accept **72/81%** Oppose **8/6%**

3. Does your department conduct on-going diversity training?
   Yes **77/98%** No **20/0%** Infrequent **3/2%**

   If yes, who facilitated the training and by what medium?
   Outside consultant **75/70%** Video **55/30%**
   Labor group **5/0%** Interactive **50/70%**
   Management staff **10/15%** Lecture **0/0%**
   Peer group **10/15%** Other (state) **2% seminars**

4. How would you rate the effectiveness of the training?
   Effective **15/10%** Satisfactory **75/70%** Needs Improvement **10/20%**

5. Was the diversity training mandated upon the department after employee complaints?
   Yes 14/5% No **86/95%**

6. How would you rate top level management commitment to diversity issues within your department?
   High **18/22%** Articulated Only **71/76%** Unknown **11/2%**

7. Do you believe that entry and promotional standards have been lowered to assist diversity in goals?

Yes **92/86%** No **3/0%** Unknown **5/14%**

8. Rate the internal barriers to diversity?

Prejudices 44/42%
Fear 3/2%
Lack of knowledge 3/4%
Lack of management support 9/6%
Politics 3/8%
Peer pressure 20/14%
Organization culture 18/24%
Other n/a

9. Rate are the external barriers to diversity?

Prejudices **40/39%**
Fear **2/1%**
Lack of knowledge **3/3%**
Lack of management support **6/5%**
Politics **30/31%**
Peer pressure **8/7%**
Organization culture **11/14%**
Other **n/a**

10. Who benefits from a diverse workforce?

Organization **98/97%**
Individuals **96/98%**
Customers **81/92%**
Society **87/91%**

11. Diversity is:

Equal Opportunity Employment **86/79%**
Male/female issues **90/92%**
Minority issues **99/97%**
Affirmation action goals **99/99%**
Valuing individual differences **94/96%**

Appendix B

TO: ALL FIRE DISTRICT PERSONNEL **DATE:** June 1, 1998

FROM: BOB ROPER, FIRE CHIEF

SUBJECT: EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY POLICY

DISPOSITION: POST ON ALL BULLETIN BOARDS
ALL LOCATIONS

As Fire Chief of the Ventura County Fire Protection District, I am strongly committed to the principles and practices of Equal Employment Opportunity. Each employee, manager, and supervisor is directed to support and enforce the intent and laws of Equal Opportunity. My commitment is consistent with the policy of the Board of Supervisors. In addition to the legal requirements of Equal Opportunity, there is a moral and ethical obligation for all employees to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect. In addition, this policy recognizes the importance of an increased sensitivity by all members of the Fire District to a diverse workforce. This policy is meant to compliment and work in concert with existing policies.

Discrimination and harassment are illegal and violate state and federal law; create a negative atmosphere which decreases productivity, diminishes morale, destroys the professional image of the organization, and undermines the integrity of the workplace. With these points in mind, I expect that all employees, supervisors, and managers adhere to and enforce the principles of Equal Employment Opportunity as a part of their legal responsibility and professional and ethical obligation.

All employment related activities conducted within the Fire District will be consistent with the laws of Equal Employment Opportunity and the guidelines of dignity, respect and courtesy to others. Applicants for employment and current employees will not be deprived of employment opportunities or promotions because of race, religion, gender, color, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, medical condition, marital status, age, sexual orientation, or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local ordinance or regulation.

It is the policy of the Ventura County Fire Protection District that:

1. All employees shall support the provisions of the Equal Employment Opportunity Policy. All managers and supervisors will be held highly accountable and responsible for enforcing the entire scope of the policy as it relates to employees under their supervision. Supervisors and managers are tasked to perform regular inspections of workplaces to ensure this policy's compliance.

2. Employee Performance Evaluations of all levels of managers and supervisors will include an evaluation of their effectiveness to the enforcement and adherence to the Equal Employment Opportunity Policy. It is the responsibility of all supervisors and managers to encourage and actively provide a work environment that is totally free of harassment and discrimination.

3. The Fire District is committed to providing a work environment that is free from harassment and discrimination. To this end, conduct which is not permissible, inappropriate, and will not be tolerated in the workplace include: speech or conduct which is illegal or unacceptable; or conduct which uses power, rank, job classification, or authority to take advantage of, discriminate against, or degrade another person.

For reference purposes, listed below are a sample of the broad categories and definitions which may lend themselves to situations leading to discrimination or harassment. The examples given within or in addition to the following definitions are not an exhaustive list and are meant to be typical examples.

DISCRIMINATION:

An employment action, practice, or policy, however neutral in intent or impartial in administration which has a disparate impact, or results in disparate impact because of race, gender, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, mental disability, medical condition, marital status, age, or sexual orientation. Examples of discriminatory acts which shall not be tolerated include the use of derogatory speech, including jokes; derogatory pictures, cartoons or posters; and actions which result in an employee being discriminated against because of their race, gender, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, medical condition, marital status, age or sexual orientation.

RETALIATION:

Retaliation is an illegal employment action, which is neither equitable or impartial, that adversely affects the working conditions or employment conditions of an employee because that employee has filed a complaint, testified, assisted, or participated in an investigation or proceeding involving County, State, or Federal investigative authorities. Because acts of retaliation violate the principles of dignity and respect to others, and because these acts are a violation of law, they will not be tolerated within the Ventura County Fire Protection District.

DISABILITY:

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 protects qualified applicants and employees with disabilities from discrimination in hiring, promotion, discharge, pay, job training, fringe benefits, and other aspects of employment on the basis of disability. In addition, the law requires that employees with disabilities be provided with reasonable accommodations which do not impose hardship on the employer.

PREGNANCY:

State law requires approval of up to sixteen weeks pregnancy leave, either paid or leave without pay. In addition to approving necessary leave (which may exceed the minimum six week requirement), alternate assignments will be made available, upon request, for employees who desire to be removed from the potential of exposure to hazardous environments.

AGE:

It is illegal for employers to refuse to hire or employ, or to dismiss, discharge, reduce, suspend, or demote, any person over the age of 40 on the grounds of age, except where the law requires or provides for such action. This does not include instances where the employee or applicant failed to meet bona fide requirements for the job or position sought or held.

HAZING:

Hazing is the persecution or harassment of individual/s with meaningless, humiliating practical jokes. This type of inappropriate behavior is neither condoned nor tolerated by this administration and shall be dealt with accordingly. Hazing shall not be allowed even if witnesses/participants deemed the victim/s authorize it by their lack of opposition. Besides being a totally inappropriate way of treating a fellow human being, it also demeans the professional image for which we strive for with the public.

HARASSMENT:

Harassment is an offensive or hostile working environment which is created by inappropriate and/or illegal statements or treatment in violation of equal employment law, Fire District policy, County regulations, and or Board of Supervisors' mandate.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT:

Sexual harassment is an illegal working condition which is in violation of state and federal law. It is not limited to a situation involving a male supervisor and a female subordinate. Sexual harassment includes all unwelcome sexual advances or actions from a person of either gender toward any person of the opposite or same gender. Sexual harassment may occur in situations involving peers, subordinates, and/or supervisors.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, through published guidelines, has established the following conduct as inappropriate and/or illegal in the workplace:

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and/or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when: 1. submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment; 2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting the individual; 3. such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Written examples of sexual harassment include suggestive or obscene letters, notes, invitations, and sexually oriented printed materials; verbal examples include derogatory comments, slurs, or jokes; physical examples include assault, touching, impeding, or blocking movements; and visual examples include leering, sexually oriented gestures and/or postures and sexually oriented images or displays via electronic methods i.e. television or video cassette recorder. Other examples include the threat or insinuation that lack of sexual favors will result in retaliation; withholding support for appointments, promotions, transfers, or any employment related actions; failure on probation; punitive actions; change of assignments; a non-justifiable, inequitable performance evaluation; or creating an uncooperative work environment.

Each alleged action of sexual harassment will be determined on a case by case basis through an investigation and finding of facts to determine if sexual harassment did actually occur. All factors, including the nature of the sexual advances, and the context in which the allegations occurred will be considered in the analysis and in determining the proper final resolution. This policy is not to be construed to prohibit mutually welcome social relationships between employees, which have no bearing on employment decisions. The department strongly discourages supervisors and managers from establishing relationships with subordinates. This situation sets the stage for quid pro quo allegations.

Appropriate disciplinary actions will be initiated against any employee who violates this policy. As stated above, each case will be evaluated on the merits of its own facts. Depending upon the individual circumstances and substantiated violations, appropriate disciplinary action may include discipline up to, and including termination.

Any employee who feels or believes that this policy has been violated shall notify at least one of the following: the Fire District Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, or their appropriate supervisor, manager, Executive Staff member, or the Fire Chief. In addition, authorities outside the Fire District that employees may report allegations to include: the County Affirmative Action Officer, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, and the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

All employees are directed to cooperate fully with each or any of the investigative authority addressing issues concerning this policy.

With the help and cooperation of every employee, supervisor, and manager, the Ventura County Fire Protection District can achieve the goals of equal employment opportunity in the establishment of a bias-free workplace where equity and merit are the professional, prevailing standard for all employees.