

**TAMPA FIRE RESCUE
OPERATIONS DIVISION
AUDIT 09-14
SEPTEMBER 25, 2009**



CITY OF TAMPA

Pam Iorio, Mayor

Internal Audit Department

Roger Strout, Internal Audit Director

September 25, 2009

Honorable Pam Iorio
Mayor, City of Tampa
1 City Hall Plaza
Tampa, Florida

RE: Tampa Fire Rescue's Operations Division, Audit 09-14

Dear Mayor Iorio:

Attached is the Internal Audit Department's report on Tampa Fire Rescue's Operations Division.

The Assistant Fire Chief of Operations has already taken positive actions in response to our recommendations. We thank the management and staff of Tampa Fire Rescue, Human Resources, Technology & Innovation, and the Payroll Division for their cooperation and assistance during this audit.

Sincerely,

/s/ Roger Strout

Roger Strout
Internal Audit Director

cc: Darrell Smith, Chief of Staff
Bonnie Wise, Director, Revenue and Finance
Dennis Jones, Fire Chief
Scott Ehlers, Assistant Fire Chief of Operations
James Buckner, Director, Technology & Innovation
Kimberly Crum, Director, Human Resources

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/s/ Gary Chapman

Auditor

/s/ Roger Strout

Audit Director

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BACKGROUND

Tampa Fire Rescue's Operations Division consists of Suppression, Rescue, Special Operations, and Airport Divisions; 553 of the 586 sworn employees are assigned to these divisions. The functions of the Operations Division are detailed in TFR's Rules and Regulations, Section 100.06. The Operations Division is under the leadership of Assistant Chief of Operations.

Suppression, which is sometimes referred to as the Combat Division, is where the majority of Tampa Fire Rescue's budget and personnel are assigned. The Suppression area includes the Firefighters, Driver/Engineers, Captains, and District Chiefs that serve from Tampa's 21 fire stations. Suppression's main responsibilities are first response to all emergency scenes and fire suppression.

To operate on a 24/7 basis, TFR divides its personnel into three 24-hour shifts or divisions. Shift personnel are geographically deployed into four districts (21 fire stations). Each district is managed by a District Chief, who reports to a Division Chief (one for each shift). The Division Chiefs report to the Assistant Fire Chief of Operations.

On August 1, 2007, TFR implemented a structure fire tiered response to allow for more efficient and effective operations. This "Working Fire" strategy reduced the number of units initially dispatched to fire calls for service. When a structure fire is confirmed by the initial response units, additional supporting units are dispatched to the scene.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

This audit was conducted in accordance with the Internal Audit Department's FY09 Audit Agenda. The objectives of this audit were to ensure that:

1. Tampa Fire Rescue's Operations Division was minimizing daily staffing overtime in accordance with its policies and procedures.
2. The "Working Structure Fire" response strategy was working as intended.
3. The Exchange of Time program was operating in compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act, Tampa Fire Rescue's Rules & Regulations, and the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) union agreement.

STATEMENT OF SCOPE

The audit period covered overtime activity (Operations Division only) that occurred from October 1, 2008, to June 21, 2009; response activity to fire calls for service from August 1, 2008, to May 31, 2009; and exchange of time activity since fiscal year 2003. Source

documentation was obtained from Tampa Fire Rescue, Technology & Innovation, and the Payroll Division. Original records as well as copies were used as evidence and verified through physical examination.

STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

Sample items for overtime testing were randomly selected. Response to fire calls for service were tested in total and then scoped to extract all "working fire" responses. Exchange of time activity was tested in total. When appropriate, judgmental sampling was used to improve the overall efficiency of the audit.

To achieve the audit's objectives, reliance was placed on computer-processed data contained in the City's financial and payroll systems, Tampa Fire Rescue's Central Database, and the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. The City's financial and payroll systems and the CAD system were previously determined to be reliable and no additional work was necessary. We assessed the reliability of the data contained in the Central Database and conducted sufficient tests of the data contained in the system. Based on these assessments and tests, we concluded the data was sufficiently reliable to be used in meeting the audit's objectives.

STATEMENT OF AUDITING STANDARDS

We conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

AUDIT CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the test work performed and the audit findings noted below, we conclude that:

1. The Operations Division was performing adequately to avoid overtime; however, document processing controls should be strengthened.
2. The "Working Fire Strategy" response strategy was working as intended; however, variances from response time objectives were not always investigated to determine the cause for delays and development of corrective actions.
3. While the Exchange of Time program was operating in compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act, Tampa Fire Rescue's Rules & Regulations, and the IAFF union agreement, additional policies should be developed to help ensure the propriety of the program.

While the findings discussed below may not, individually or in the aggregate, significantly impair the operations of the Tampa Fire Rescue, they do present risks that can be more effectively controlled.

INITIATING & PROCESSING OVERTIME RECORDS

AUDIT ISSUE

Overtime forms were not consistently reconciled to the daily Wall Report, which resulted in some missing documents and potentially underpaid employees.

OBSERVATIONS

Overtime is recorded on the Request for Advance Authorization for Overtime (Form HR 305). The form is initiated by the employee and approved by the District Chief. A check box on Tampa Fire Rescue's daily Wall Report (report showing staffing summary by District and detail of employees hired for overtime) is used to document that the paperwork was processed. The check box was not used consistently. Of the 56 overtime occurrences tested, three (3) employees were not paid for all the overtime worked. The actual cause could not be determined – either the paperwork was not prepared by the employee, which may have happened in at least one case, or was not processed by management.

CRITERIA

Tampa Fire Rescue's Rules & Regulations, Section 103.02, Personnel Regulations - Overtime Requests, describes the overtime process. Article 9.4 of the IAFF agreement with the City calls for "payment at the rate of time and one-half for all hours actually worked in excess of 144 hours of work plus a 24 hour Kelly Day¹, in a three week cycle."

RISK DESCRIPTION

Employees working overtime will not get paid until the paperwork is processed.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Operations Division management should reconcile HR 305 forms to the Wall Report on a daily basis to ensure all overtime paperwork is processed. This activity should be documented on the Wall Report. Any discrepancies should be followed up in a timely manner.

MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE

Tampa Fire Rescue is committed to make all its processes more efficient and effective including the overtime process and the recommendation as suggested is viable. Over the last couple of years Tampa Fire Rescue has made improvements to the various processes to include the overtime tracking. The current Wall Report provides Division Chiefs the availability to check off the overtime hired to verify the HR 305. To help ensure that all discrepancies are followed up with we will implement a check and balance for those outstanding. As part of the current consolidation of the Personnel Division, all overtime forms after being reconciled by the Division Chief are placed in a box to go downtown for processing. With this collection of forms, we can check these against the wall report and identify those missing. This can then be corrected by the responsible District Chief. The person responsible for this reconciliation will be the Asst. Chief's Administrative Support. Time for implementation - immediately.

¹ Firefighters work every third day. During their three week work cycle, Firefighters are provided a day off or "Kelly Day" in order to reduce the number of hours worked to 120 hours.

DAILY STAFFING (HIRING OF OVERTIME) PROCESS

AUDIT ISSUE

Daily staffing (hiring of overtime) is a manual, labor intensive process performed to ensure minimum personnel requirements are met at the morning shift change. Errors were discovered during testing – most of which were minor and corrected during the District Chiefs’ meeting held later in the morning. While overall, Operations Division personnel appeared very conscientious about minimizing overtime costs, the errors discovered resulted in some avoidable overtime.

OBSERVATIONS

The daily staffing process was observed on two occasions. The process was conducted by the Division and District Chiefs each morning prior to the shift change. A thorough knowledge of station staffing requirements, personnel, their rank, time on the job, and their qualifications is required to make the determination on the need for hiring overtime. During the observations, personnel appeared sufficiently knowledgeable and conscientious in the staffing process.

In late 2008, Technology & Innovation completed a business process modeling project that documented all the activities associated with the overtime hiring process. The results of the project identified possibilities for improvement, one of which was "to implement an integrated approach to daily staffing that includes overtime selection, tracking, and reporting capabilities." There are automated scheduling applications available in the marketplace that consider the specific staffing challenges inherent in fire and rescue operations. Currently, the project has been delayed due to more pressing needs and the lack of resources.

CRITERIA

Minimum staffing for the four districts and airport was established at 124. Because of specific needs, overtime may be incurred at higher levels.

RISK DESCRIPTION

Errors in determining minimum staffing needs can result in the hiring of overtime and incurring some avoidable payroll costs.

RECOMMENDATION 2

As resources permit, TFR should continue its efforts to purchase a decision-making software to manage the filling of daily vacancies and ensure the minimization of overtime hiring.

MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE

Tampa Fire Rescue has worked diligently over the last several years to overcome some outdated processes regarding paperwork to include daily staffing worksheets and daily wall reports. Tampa Fire Rescue identified early on that numerous related forms and processes were interconnected to each other which if automated with a software program could ensure proper staffing. This initiative is still a priority with T & I, but has been placed below some higher priority initiatives at the city level. Tampa Fire Rescue will still continue to push for this “datamart” project. Timeline for implementation - immediately by Tampa Fire Rescue / T & I will need to prioritize.

RESPONSE TIME MONITORING

AUDIT ISSUE

Threshold time (time from call dispatch to time units leave station) and travel time (time from when units leave stations to time units arrive on scene) were longer than stated objectives. While fire calls for service undergo a quality control review, deviations from response time objectives were not investigated to determine the cause for delays. Five percent of the data records in the CAD system contained missing or inaccurate time data.

OBSERVATIONS

Response times were calculated for fire-related calls for service. During the period August 1, 2008, to May 31, 2009, Tampa Fire Rescue responded to 8,486 fire-related calls for service. Of these, 416 were omitted from the response analysis due to missing or inaccurate data. 1,202 non-emergency calls and another 1,317 calls that exceeded 15 minutes total time were also removed from the analysis to be consistent with TFR's reporting methodology. Calls with total times exceeding 15 minutes are assumed to be due to delays with capturing applicable times. Based on a goal of 80% compliance with stated time objectives, the results of analyzing 5,551 calls for service were favorable for dispatch and total times, but unfavorable for threshold and travel times:

<u>Response Time Objective</u>	<u>Compliance %</u>
Dispatch Time (2 minute objective)	96.2%
Threshold Time (2 minute objective)	64.8%
Travel Time (4 minute objective)	67.3%
Total Time (8 minute objective)	88.6%

CRITERIA

Tampa Fire Rescue established the following "Standard of Cover" (performance objectives for response times):

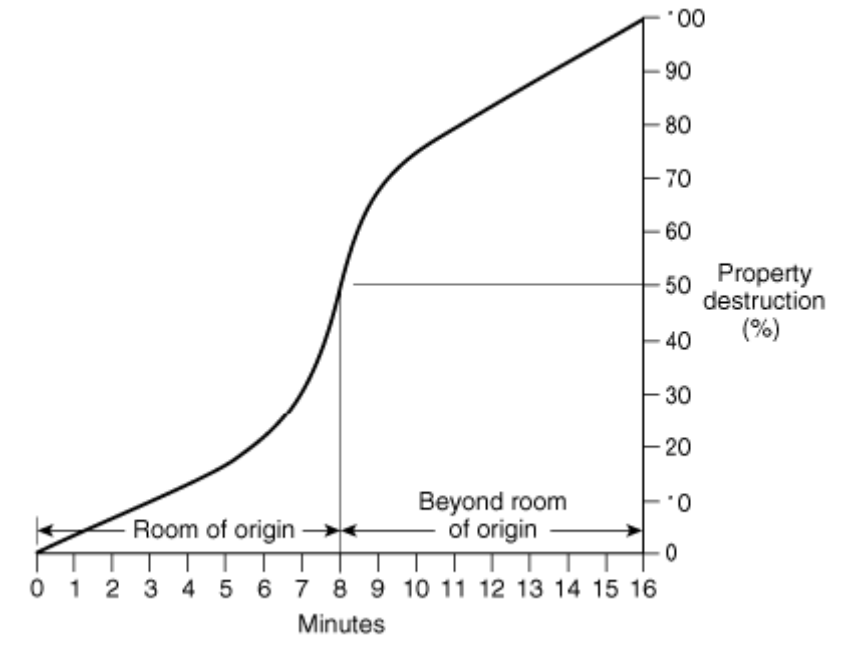
Dispatch Time (call received to call dispatched) – less than 2 minutes, 80% of the time
Threshold Time (call dispatched to time left station) – less than 2 minutes, 80% of the time
Travel Time (time left station to scene arrival) – less than 4 minutes, 80% of the time
Total Time (call received to scene arrival) – less than 8 minutes, 80% of the time

RISK DESCRIPTION

According to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 (A.5.2),

Suppression capability is an expression of how much fire-fighting power can be put into action when there is a fire. It includes the amount of apparatus, equipment, and personnel available; the time needed to respond and place equipment in action; the water supply; the application of strategy and tactics; the level of training; and all of the components that add up to effective fireground operations.

Usually, the most effective strategy to reduce loss of lives and property damage is to provide an early response to a working fire. According to the NFPA's Fire Propagation Curve (see below), the progression of a structural fire to the point of flashover (a very rapid spreading of the fire) generally occurs in less than 10 minutes.



Source: NFPA 1710, *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*, 2004 Edition, Figure A.5.2.2.2.1 Fire Propagation Curve.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Compliance with response time objectives should be addressed during the quality control review. Significant variances should be investigated to determine the cause for the delays and whether any corrective actions can be taken.

MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE

Response time is a key issue for Tampa Fire Rescue that we identified in the recent request for accreditation. Currently, District Chiefs during station inspections completed every quarter will do a 'threshold' drill to document compliance or non compliance. Additionally, recent software programs purchased and implemented will allow District Chiefs to track and correct response time objectives at the company level. The current reporting program (Documed) allows District Chiefs to review run report along with response times. The other program, NFIRS 5 Alive is currently being edited for proper reports and once complete can be provided to all District Chiefs. This breaks down the various runs by Company to determine compliance with Department objectives regarding thresholds time and travel time. Timeline for implementation - 6 months.

EXCHANGE OF TIME PROGRAM

AUDIT ISSUE

Tampa Fire Rescue's Rules & Regulations, Section 104.14, states that Exchanges of Time are "1 for 1 / body for body" and that the City will not be liable for the employee not fulfilling the Exchange of Time commitment. It appears that the intent of the program is that an employee working another employee's shift will eventually be "paid back" with corresponding time off. Based on the analyses conducted, this did not always occur. Large time balances were discovered that make it appear unlikely that the time will be repaid.

OBSERVATIONS

Exchange of Time programs are a common practice in city and county fire departments. The Fair Labor Standards Act provides guidance on how these programs should be administered. A nationwide inquiry revealed that typically fire departments place restrictions on how many exchanges may occur during a given period (from five per year to unlimited), time limits on when the exchange must be paid back (from during the current pay cycle to one year from the initial exchange), and prohibit other forms of pay back.

The Exchange of Time program should not result in any cost to the City, but the hours exchanged are recorded in the City's payroll system. Time summaries by employee and earning codes were extracted from the PeopleSoft datamart. Earning Code EPA (Exchange Pay) is used by the employee scheduled to work. Earning Code EOT (exchange of time) is used by the employee who agreed to work for the employee scheduled to work. Earning Codes EOS (exchange sick) and EOA (exchange annual) are used when the employee who previously agreed to work has called in sick or taken unscheduled annual leave. Using the data extracted from PeopleSoft, the following analyses were prepared:

- FY2009 Exchange of Time – The results showed an overall balance (sum of all earning codes) equal to -53.9 hours. This was an expected result for the program. However, there is a wide variation (-373 hours to +381 hours) when individual employees were examined.
- FY2003 to FY2009 Exchange of Time (scoped by absolute value of total > 500 hours) – The results showed 25 employees "owed" more than 500 hours (range of 508 hours to 2,438.5 hours) and 19 employees "were owed" more than 500 hours (range of 515 hours to 1,278.5 hours).
- FY2009 EOS & EOA Earning Codes – The results showed that 39 employees agreed to an Exchange of Time and then called in sick or took unscheduled annual leave.

CRITERIA

Tampa Fire Rescue's Rules & Regulations, Section 104.14, states that Exchanges of Time are "1 for 1 / body for body" and that the City will not be liable for the employee not fulfilling the Exchange of Time commitment. It continues that the "Exchange of Time shall not result in any monetary cost to the City." There are no provisions requiring the exchange be "paid back" within any time constraints or that it be "paid back" at all. It does state, "An employee not fulfilling their agreement will be charged with the time off duty according to the reason off duty."

Section 7(p)(3) of the Fair Labor Standards Act provides that two individuals employed in the same capacity by the same public agency may agree, solely at their option and with the approval of the public agency, to substitute for one another during scheduled work hours. In a 2004 opinion letter, the Department of Labor (DOL) states, "There is no provision in section 7(p)(3) or its implementing regulations that could be construed to require one individual to "repay" the other individual who agrees to a work substitution arrangement. This is a matter left for the parties to resolve." In a 2008 opinion letter, the DOL states that the only employer concern is "where the substituting employee has worked so many substitute shifts that his or her wages for all hours worked in the workweek otherwise would fall below the minimum wage."

RISK DESCRIPTION

While the City is not liable for any employee not fulfilling the Exchange of Time commitment, conflicts between employees may arise when commitments are not honored.

RECOMMENDATION 4

To ensure the propriety of the Exchange of Time program, additional policies should be developed to limit the number of exchanges allowed to reasonable levels, ensure the pay back of exchanged time within a reasonable time period, and prohibit other forms of pay back.

MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE

Tampa Fire Rescue agrees with the recommendation concerning Exchange of Times. Previously, a policy regarding Exchange of Times required an individual to repay the time within 1 year. This was removed from the Rules and Regulations under the last administration. Tampa Fire Rescue will reinstitute the policy that the time needs to be paid back within 1 year as well as limiting the number of allowed Exchange of Time per person to less than 6 per year. One setback to this would be that currently Tampa Fire Rescue does not have the capability to track this. However, PeopleSoft provides reports to track these Exchange of Times for which Tampa Fire Rescue would need access. Timeline for implementation - 6 months.