

1.) COMPLAINT

The Fire Alarm Operators (the people who handle 911 calls and dispatch apparatus) operate under this department.

The Chief Operator, the City Electrician, and the Fire Chief all appear to have authority over them. Yet there is confusion when an administrative decision is required; someone always has to check with someone else. In addition, the Fire Department does not always share data with the Electrical Department, making the Operators' jobs even more difficult. The Operators claim there is no clear-cut line of authority, and that neither the Electrical Department or the Fire Department has a written manual of procedure.

RESPONSE

The Fire Alarm Operators are under the jurisdiction of the City Electrician, the Assistant City Electrician when necessary, and their immediate supervisor is the Chief Fire Alarm Operator. When the City Electrician decides there is a need for a change in procedures, the new procedure is written and posted in the Fire Alarm Office. Operators are required to sign the posted procedure to insure that it was read, and understood. Any operator that may be confused, or that may not understand the reason for the change is free at any time to converse with the City Electrician or Chief Operator for further discussion on the subject matter.

Periodically meetings are held with the City Electrician, Chief Operator, and Operators, to discuss problems that may exist. During the meetings the Operators are free to voice their opinion on any matter they may be concerned with. The City Electrician will address any problem that is brought up and take action to make corrections if necessary. The attendance is usually 100%.

The Fire Chief and the City Electrician and or Chief Operator meet when conditions require a change in procedures concerning the Fire Department. The changes are prepared and enforced by the City Electrician. The Fire Chief also informs this Department, as necessary of any item that would be of interest, or of necessity to this Department and this information is usually received on a daily basis.

The Fire Alarm Office and each Operator has a standard operation procedure manual that covers all pertinent information in regards to the operation of the Fire Alarm Office.

2.) COMPLAINT

The Department is in continual violation of Article X, Section 2 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. When overtime shifts occur, the Department has used randomly selected personnel, and in some cases, the Chief Operator, to fill shifts.

RESPONSE

Overtime in this division is rotated as equally as possible among all Operators. The rotation is based upon the ability to make contact with individuals, which at times may be difficult because of the schedule that they work, vacations, or other benefits that allow for time off.

The Chief Operator while on duty may cover an operators 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. shift.

During multiple alarm fires, the Chief Operator and or the City Electrician respond to supervise the operation. At this time the Chief Operator receives overtime compensation.

3.) COMPLAINT

The Department continues to garner large sums of money from fees charged to businesses that possess auxiliarized fire alarm systems. Yet for just a few minutes work, a Signal Maintainer receives four hours of pay at the rate of time-and-one-half per hour. Fire Alarm Operators are denied this.

RESPONSE

The Department collects fees for service rendered in accordance with Ordance No. 1000 which includes payments from Companies that require their auxiliarized fire systems disconnected and reconnected for the purpose of system tests, maintenance, or unrelated work being performed that may cause a false alarm. The fees are required when service is required beyond the Electrical Departments normal business hours. The intent of the fee is to help defray costs to the City, NOT PROFIT.

The actual time spent on any call is applicable to the nature of the request of the owner. The Signal Maintainers receive compensation in accordance with Article X Section 2 - B of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

This service is provided by the Signal Maintenance Division. If a Signal Maintainer cannot be contacted the Department may, by Ordinance, allow any qualified member of the Electrical Department to provide this service.

4.) COMPLAINT

The Electrical Department continues to permit its employees to operate unsafe motor vehicles. These trucks have major defects, such as brakes, engine and transmission, that not only present a threat to the public but a danger to the personnel. In 1986, two new vehicles were purchased by the City for the department's use, but assigned to management.

RESPONSE

This Department has a total of ten vehicles that range in age from 1 to 14 years old, that certainly experience mechanical problems. When repairs are required, they are accomplished within the guide lines of the City's bidding process, and are corrected as soon as possible. To my knowledge there are no existing mechanical problems warranted that may present a threat to the operator or the Public.

The Department has not received any written or verbal complaints in references to this situation in several months.

In the FY 84 budget a truck was purchased to replace a car that could not appropriately support the function of the supervisor of the Electrical Division. An additional truck was purchased in FY 85 for use by the Signal Maintenance Foreman's position, that was previously vacant. A third vehicle was pruchased in FY 86, to be delivered in 1987, that will serve the Signal Maintainers and Street Lighting.

The FY 88 budget requests the replacement of three vehicles that would be used in the Electrical and Signal Maintenance divisions.

5.) COMPLAINT

Since 1987, the Fire Alarm Operators have been subject to abuses in management and welfare. Kitchen and washing facilities have been removed. Heating and air conditioning were maintained only after the Department was ordered to do so by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Telephone and radio systems continue to function on a day-to-day basis, despite the on-going construction of a new multi-million dollar emergency dispatch center.

RESPONSE

In February 1987 an extensive renovation commenced in the Electrical Departments offices to provide for a new communication center. The Employees that occupied this space were relocated into the kitchen and locker/shower facilities of the Fire Alarm office. The kitchen and locker facilities were relocated as a temporary measure. Although this is an inconvenience for the operators, the relocation of other personnel has a major impact on the ability to perform their duties, but are willing to accept their temporary quarters.

The heating system was interrupted during the renovations in the spring and summer of 1987, and the first phase of a new heating system was installed.

The Electrical Departments heating system is derived from purchased steam, and was turned on at the appropriate time to concur with laws pertaining with heat. Once steam was available the heating contractor was notified to turn on the new heating system and the heating system supplying the Fire Alarm office had been disconnected, because of the design of the system in relation to the renovated area, and subsequently electric heaters were installed. During the week of September 15th.

The Department was not officially notified by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health of any violation of laws pertaining heat, but did receive an unsigned copy of the States law, not postmarked that was anonymously left at the City Electrician's office.

The air conditioners were temporarily wired at the onset of the air conditioning season and were only interrupted when necessary, for the contractor to perform electrical work on electrical panels that serviced this equipment.

The present telephone and radio systems continue to operate in the manner of which they were designed, and experience malfunctions at times considering its age of approximately 20 years, but has not jeopardized the operation of the Fire Alarm office.

6.) COMPLAINT

This center, incidentally, is six weeks behind scheduled completion. Fire Alarm Operators have received no training in theory or operation of the new equipment. A new IBM computer system was installed for the operators' use, but was then removed by the Chief Operator after complaints by two men that the device was detrimental to the function of the office.

RESPONSE

The new communication office is eight weeks behind schedule primarily because of unforeseen problems with the contractor receiving equipment.

The Fire Alarm operators have been informed in regards to the theory of the equipment being installed, but have not received training. The project is not to the stage where it would be appropriate to train personnel, and notification will be made as to when training will commence.

An IBM PC computer was installed for the purpose of identifying hazardous materials in various buildings in Cambridge. This program was initiated by the Department of Health and Hospitals and Emergency Management, and to my knowledge the program has not been completed due to the extensive amount of data to be compiled and therefore not in use.

The computer was installed at an early stage in order to allow the operators to become familiar with its operation. The result was that most operators became familiar with the equipment and its operation, and some used this for personal reasons that resulted in complaints in this regard the equipment was removed until the program for which it was intended is implemented.

7.) COMPLAINT

The Chief Operator, Tom Cahill, was installed in his position formally by City Manager Robert Healy in 1985.

This, despite repeated claims by departmental employees and others, that he was and is unfit for the job. A request by departmental employees for a Civil Service examination to fill the position was refused. Mr. Cahill now connects himself less and less with the day-to-day operations of the Fire Alarm Office, and more with the administration of the auxiliarized box system. This job should be done by Fred O'Connor, the Day Superintendent.

RESPONSE

Records show that the position of Chief Fire Alarm Operator was established in 1974, at this time Mr. Cahill was appointed as Acting until 1983 when he was appointed as provisional pending a non-qualifying exam for a permanent promotion. The provisional appointment was based on a notice signed by eligible operators that they did not have an interest in applying for the position.

To this date this office has not received any written or verbal request suggesting an examination, if appropriate or any communication resembling the allegation questioning his ability to perform in this position.

Mr. Cahill is a highly self motivated individual dedicated to his position and any task that he is requested to perform and goes beyond his normal duties to insure that the operation of the Fire Alarm office is properly functioning. He is undeniably qualified for this position, and has over 20 years experience in the Fire Alarm office.

Mr. Cahill is fully involved with the operation of the Fire Alarm office, and is in contact via telephone and radio during off hours to attend to any problems or question that may occur.

The Fire Alarm Operators are required to monitor the Fire Alarm system, take daily voltage and ground readings of the Fire Alarm box circuits, record all testing of the system, report all requests for disconnecting or reconnecting of fire alarm boxes and close any open circuit from within the office.

The position of Day Superintendent does not exist in this Department. Mr. O'Connor is the Signal Maintenance Foreman and is responsible for maintaining all equipment pertaining to the fire alarm system, including but not limited to underground and arial cables, fire alarm boxes, conduits and ducts, registers, gongs, batteries and police alarms and call boxes.

8.) COMPLAINT

Mr. Cahill has also taken overtime pay for restoring disconnected auxiliarized fire alarm systems; this is a job for Signal Maintainers. He has also used himself as an operator on day shifts when an operator was out sick, on vacation or administrative leave. He is required to call back an operator for this shift. As a management person, he is not permitted to fill such a shift himself.

RESPONSE

Mr. Cahill is qualified and has received training in disconnecting or restoring fire alarm master boxes. In the past three years, on three occasions Mr. Cahill was requested to restore a fire box because a Signal Maintainer could not be contacted, and in fact did receive overtime compensation.

The City Electrician has also on three occasions closed open circuits, or restored a fire alarm box because personnel were not available. The system must be maintained under any circumstance.

Records show that the position of Chief Fire Alarm Operator shall perform the duties of an operator and supervise the office, record records, and prepare daily reports of all incidents.

9.) COMPLAINT

The Fire Alarm Operators enjoy few of the benefits received by other City employees. There is no education incentive, no night or weekend differential, no seniority classification.

The paid holiday plan is less than that received by the rest of the City employees.

RESPONSE

The Fire Alarm Operators have educational benefits as covered in Article XXV of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, this office has not received any request for this benefit from Fire Alarm Operators.

The Electricians are exercising this benefit to receive a code review to obtain a license renewal and three Signal Maintainers are scheduled to attend classes in March for Fire Alarm Certification.

Holiday pay is covered in Article XII Section 3 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The additional benefits mentioned should be obtained through Union Negotiations.

10.) COMPLAINT

There is no Senior Operator. Operators are left to decide between themselves what action to take at a given incident.

Both operators on a shift share the responsibility for a good or bad decision. The City does not provide Fire Alarm Operators with any formal training. As a result, the quality of service provided by the department varies wildly depending on who is on duty.

RESPONSE

Presently there is no position such as Senior Operator, but discussions are on going between the City Electrician and the Chief Operator as to the feasibility of this position. Mr Sedlis, the Union Steward has been informed. Creation of the position may prove to be beneficial in operating certain elements of the new communication system, and with the possibility of expanding medical service in this division.

There are two operators on a shift, therefore decision making if necessary should be expedient, and both operators can monitor an emergency call simultaneously. Ninety percent of all calls have a pre-response prepared including fire box alarms. Medical response, bomb threats, hazardous waste emergencies, fire showing, smoke showing, flooding in buildings, investigations, electrical problems, subway incidents, natural gas leaks etc. ten percent of the time an operator may receive a call that is not covered, and a decision solely based on the information received must be made. When this occurs operators have been instructed that a response of a full assignment of fire apparatus or a full assignment of medical response in the case of uncovered medical calls, would be considered proper.

Senior Operators would encounter the same situations and would be solely responsible for decision making and this may not prove beneficial.

Training for fire alarm operators is provided in house by the Chief Fire Alarm Operator, training for our procedures are not available otherwise. Training is usually given to the two operators while on duty, unless it is beneficial to address the entire group, because of the time element of implementation, of the new procedure.

The quality of service does not vary unless procedures are neglected.

11.) COMPLAINT

The union representing them, Local 195 IPEA, has continually refused to bargain equitably with the Fire Alarm Office; as a result, the Fire Alarm Operators have been continually denied requested benefits and improvements. President Cassidy has been quoted as saying, "We will not slow the progress of achieving a contract simply because it may inconvenience a few members." Because the operators are only ten in number, out of a union of a thousand members, they are not given equivalent representation by the union. This is a violation of Massachusetts Labor Relations law.

RESPONSE

In as far as this Department is involved in Union negotiations or as far as being contacted by the Local in order to air any differences I would estimate that the Local and the bargaining committee has equitably represented the members of this department.

This Department may not be aware of all the request submitted to the union for bargaining.

12.) COMPLAINT

There are four openings for new operators in the Fire Alarm Office; they have existed since 1985. Yet the department refuses to hire. There are two provisional operators currently employed, who should have been terminated when the new Operators' Civil Service list came out in 1986. That is required by Civil Service law. Yet these people continue to work, denying work to persons qualified for the jobs.

RESPONSE

There are presently four vacancies in the Fire Alarm offices, the vacancies started in 1984. At this time the Civil Service list was exhausted and an exam was held in April 1986 and a new list established in December of 1986. Three of the positions were filled by provisional appointments of qualified persons. Two of the provisional appointees were fire alarm operators in Arlington and Watertown, the third is on the Somerville auxiliary fire department, and is an EMT instructor.

All of the provisional appointees are on the present fire alarm list.

The Electrical Department has affirmative action goals to obtain and this is an opportunity to pursue those goals. Through the Personnel Director the Department has requested Civil Service to allow the City of Cambridge to enable this Department to select one minority and female that is qualified, on the list, and willing to accept the position. In June of 87 Civil Service sent a list of 154 individuals for the Department to select two fire alarm operators from. The City's request for a minority and female was not addressed. The Department concurred with the Personnel Director to send the list back to Civil Service and request that Civil Service address the question proposed by the City. The situation at present time is on hold pending a response from Civil Service.

COMMENTS

In the recent past the Department has solved problems by allowing the employees of the Division concerned, to present a workable solution among themselves that is suitable to the needs of the Department.

This Department welcomes employee participation in solving employee problems in relationship to management, training, expediting collective bargaining agreements, and any matter that may improve working conditions or department efficiency.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

TEL. 498-9011

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

ROBERT W. HEALY

City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI

Deputy City Manager

February 1, 1988

To the Honorable, the City Council:

With reference to Awaiting Report Item No. 17, I transmit herewith report received from George Fernandes, City Electrician, relative to complaints received about the Electrical Department and Fire Alarm Operators.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/b

Agenda Item No. 13 *S-64*

Re: response to Awaiting Report Item 17 on
the Electrical Dept.

In City Council,

February 1, 1988

Placed on G. Li