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Fraud Hotline Update: New Fire Bureau compensation package allows use of City water to wash personal vehicles, but risk of perceived waste and disregard for resource conservation remains

News Article

Fraud Hotline Follow-Up

Some progress made, but Fire Bureau changed rules to allow washing personal vehicles with City water despite Auditor's finding of government waste.

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A 2022 Auditor's Office Hotline report found that the Fire Bureau wasted resources by allowing a firefighter to use City water to wash a personal vehicle. Specifically, the report explained that doing so appeared abusive and wasteful of City resources. The Fire Bureau initially agreed with our recommendation to revise its policies to comply with City administrative rules but later entered an agreement with the Firefighters union about the issue. The Bureau plans to change its internal policy to explicitly allow employees to wash personal vehicles during leisure time.

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Two recommendations implemented



- **Fire shared rules about using City water for washing personal vehicles with staff**

We recommended that Fire share information about what is considered personal use of City resources with staff. After the Auditor's Office report, the Fire Chief issued a memo to notify staff that they should stop washing personal vehicles on with City water until the issue was resolved through the bargaining process. The resulting letter of agreement rescinds this memo and permits using City water to wash personal vehicles.

- **Supervisors did not observe staff washing personal vehicles and so did not begin disciplinary action**

We recommended that if Fire supervisors observed staff violating the Human Resources policy against personal use, they should intervene to correct the conduct and begin a disciplinary process if the conduct was repeated. Fire stated that there was no indication that supervisors observed staff washing their cars.

One Recommendation in process

- **Fire working to clarify that washing personal vehicles is allowed**



We recommended that Fire adopt a policy to clarify what is and is not considered personal use of City resources. Fire worked through the collective bargaining process to draft a letter of agreement that allows firefighters to use City water to wash personal vehicles during leisure time. The agreement was approved by City Council on April 5, 2023. Fire plans to draft an internal policy about City water use to clarify compliance with City Human Resource Administrative Rules. The new agreement is an attempt to move the issue from rules related to personal use of City resources to rules related to compensation. Including City water as part of an employee's compensation package will require additional consideration by

the Bureau of Human Resources to comply with Human Resources Administrative Rule 8.04. The new agreement also does not address the risk of perceived waste and disregard for resource conservation which were raised in the original report.

One Recommendation Not Implemented

- **Fire says no investigation warranted for truck washing**



We recommended that the Bureau investigate the truck washing identified in the original Hotline report to determine whether discipline was warranted. The Fire Bureau did not investigate the incident that prompted the Hotline report because it determined that they could not discipline the employee. The Bureau stated that because no member was on notice that washing a personal vehicle violated City rules, it would violate notions of just cause to discipline the employee.

[View the hotline tip report and recommendations summary](#)

About the Fraud Hotline

The City Auditor's Office administers the Fraud Hotline so people can confidentially and anonymously report suspected fraud, waste, inefficiency, and abuse of position regarding the City government. You can reach the Hotline online at [Portland Fraud Hotline](#) or by phone at 866-342-4148.

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