

# **SAN LORENZO VALLEY WATER DISTRICT RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE POLICY 2012**

**December 1, 2011  
Resolution No. 18 (11-12)**

## **Purpose**

The intent of this policy is to provide and establish general guidelines about conduct that is, and is not appropriate in the workplace. San Lorenzo Valley Water District is committed to creating and sustaining a professional and respectful work and public service environment free from violence, discrimination, and other offensive or degrading remarks or conduct. A workplace which promotes and maintains an environment in which all members of the Board of Directors, employees, and the public are treated with respect and dignity. The District acknowledges that this policy cannot possibly predict all situations that might arise. The District also recognizes that conflicts or disagreements may occur. The District expects these issues to be resolved in a manner that contributes to a healthy and productive workplace

## **Applicability**

Maintaining a respectful work environment is a shared responsibility. This policy is applicable to District personnel including regular and temporary employees, volunteers, and Board of Directors.

## **Abusive Customer Behavior**

While the District has a strong commitment to customer service, the District does not expect that employees accept verbal abuse from any customer. An employee may request that a supervisor intervene when a customer is abusive, or they may defuse the situation themselves, including if necessary, ending the contact. If there is a concern over the possibility of physical violence, a supervisor should be contacted immediately. When extreme conditions dictate, 911 may be called. Employees should leave the area immediately when violence is imminent unless their duties require them to remain. Employees must notify their supervisor about the incident as soon as possible.

## **Types of Disrespectful Behavior**

The following types of behaviors cause a disruption in the workplace and are, in many instances, unlawful.

### ***Violent Behavior:***

Violent behavior includes the use of physical force, harassment, or intimidation.

***Discriminatory Behavior:***

Discriminatory behavior includes inappropriate remarks about or conduct related to a person's race, color, creed, religion, national origin, disability, sex, marital status, age, sexual orientation, or status with regard to public assistance.

***Disruptive and Disrespectful Behavior:***

Disruptive and disrespectful behavior is any conduct or behavior that disrupts civility and co-operation in the workplace and interferes with efficient and effective work flow.

Disruptive behavior is any behavior in the form of hostile or unwanted conduct, verbal comments, actions or gestures that affect an employee's dignity and psychological or physical integrity. A single serious incident of such behavior that has a lasting harmful effect on an employee may also constitute disruptive and disrespectful behavior. Such behavior may include but is not limited to the following:

- Rudeness, angry outbursts, inappropriate humor, vulgar obscenities, name calling, disrespectful language, or any other behavior regarded as offensive to a reasonable person.
- Abuse of authority where an employee uses authority unreasonably to interfere with another's performance.
- Non-constructive criticism addressed in such a way as to intimidate or undermine confidence.

Disruptive and disrespectful behavior is a serious offense, however it must be distinguished from an employee's legitimate right to:

- Express opinions freely and to support positions whether or not they are in agreement with those of other employees.
- Engage in honest differences of opinion with respect to work related issues that are discussed in appropriate forums.
- Engage in good faith constructive criticism of others.
- Comply with supervisory responsibilities to address concerns regarding the performance or competence of employees.

It is not possible to anticipate in this policy every example of offensive behavior. Accordingly, employees are encouraged to discuss with their fellow employees and supervisor what is regarded as offensive, taking into account the sensibilities of employees and the possibility of public reaction. Although the standard for how employees treat each other and the general public will be the same throughout the District, there may be differences between work groups about what is appropriate in other circumstances unique to a work group. If an employee is unsure whether a particular

behavior is appropriate, the employee should request clarification from their supervisor or the District Manager.

***Sexual Harassment:***

Sexual harassment can consist of a wide range of unwanted and unwelcome sexually directed behavior such as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- Submitting to the conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment; or
- Submitting to or rejecting the conduct is used as the basis for an employment decision affecting an individual's employment; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or result of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Unwelcome or unwanted sexual advances. This means stalking, patting, pinching, brushing up against, hugging, cornering, kissing, fondling or any other similar physical contact considered unacceptable by another individual.
- Verbal or written abuse, kidding, or comments that are sexually-oriented and considered unacceptable by another individual. This includes comments about an individual's body or appearance where such comments go beyond mere courtesy, telling "dirty jokes" or any other tasteless, sexually oriented comments, innuendos or actions that offend others.
- Requests or demands for sexual favors. This includes subtle or obvious expectations, pressures, or requests for any type of sexual favor, along with an implied or specific promise of favorable treatment (or negative consequence) concerning one's current or future job.

**Employee Response to Disrespectful Workplace Behavior**

Employees who believe that disrespectful behavior is occurring are encouraged to deal with the situation in one of the ways listed below. The District encourages the prompt identification and resolution of alleged disrespectful workplace behavior by all involved and affected persons through collaborative efforts, but recognizes that such resolution may be impractical. However, if the allegations involve violent behavior, sexual harassment, or discriminatory behavior, then the employee shall immediately contact their supervisor or the District Manager.

### **Resolution Procedures**

Step 1(a). Politely, but firmly, tell whoever is engaging in the disrespectful behavior how you feel about their actions. Politely request the person to stop the behavior because you feel intimidated, offended, or uncomfortable. If practical, bring a witness with you for this discussion.

Step 1(b). If you fear adverse consequences could result from telling the offender or if the matter is not resolved by direct contact, go to your supervisor or District Manager. The person to whom you speak is responsible for documenting the issues and for giving you a status report on the matter no later than ten (10) business days after your report.

Step 1(c). In the case of violent behavior, all employees are required to report the incident immediately to their supervisor, District Manager or Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department.

### **Supervisor's Response to Allegations of Disrespectful Workplace Behavior**

Employees who have a complaint of disrespectful workplace behavior will be taken seriously. In the case of sexual harassment or discriminatory behavior, a supervisor must report the allegations within two (2) business days to the District Manager, who will determine whether an investigation is warranted. A supervisor must act upon such a report even if requested otherwise by the victim. In situations other than sexual harassment and discriminatory behavior, supervisors will use the following guidelines when an allegation is reported:

Step 1. If the nature of the allegations and the wishes of the victim warrant a simple intervention, the supervisor may choose to handle the matter informally. The supervisor may conduct a coaching session with the offender, explaining the impact of his/her actions and requiring that the conduct not reoccur. This approach is particularly appropriate when there is some ambiguity about whether the conduct was disrespectful.

Step 2. If a formal investigation is warranted, the individual alleging a violation of this policy will be interviewed to discuss the nature of the allegations. The person being interviewed may have someone of his/her own choosing present during the interview. The investigator will obtain the following description of the incident, including date, time and place.

- Corroborating evidence.
- A list of witnesses.
- Identification of the offender.

Step 3. The supervisor must notify the District Manager about the allegations.

Step 4. As soon as practical after receiving the written or verbal complaint, the alleged policy violator will be informed of the allegations. The alleged violator will have the opportunity to answer questions and respond to the allegations.

Step 5. After adequate investigation and consultation with the appropriate personnel, a decision will be made regarding whether or not disciplinary action will be taken.

Step 6. The alleged violator and complainant will be advised of the findings and conclusions as soon as practicable.

### **Special Reporting Requirements**

When the supervisor is perceived to be the cause of a disrespectful workplace behavior incident, a report will be made directly to the District Manager who will assume the responsibility for investigation and discipline.

If the District Manager is perceived to be the cause of a disrespectful workplace behavior incident, a report will be made directly to the District Counsel who will confer with the Board of Directors regarding appropriate investigation and action.

If a Board Member is perceived to be the cause of a disrespectful workplace behavior incident involving District personnel, the report will be made directly to the District Manager and referred to the District Counsel who will undertake the necessary investigation. The District Counsel will report his/her findings to the Board of Directors, which will take the action it deems appropriate.

Pending completion of the investigation, the District Manager may at his/her discretion take appropriate action to protect the alleged victim, other employees, or citizens.

### **Confidentiality**

A person reporting or witnessing a violation of this policy cannot be guaranteed anonymity. The person's name and statements may have to be provided to the alleged offender. All complaints and investigative materials will be contained in a file separate from the involved employees' personnel files. If disciplinary action does result from the investigation, the results of the disciplinary action will then become a part of the employee(s) personnel file(s).

### **Retaliation**

Consistent with the terms of applicable statutes and District personnel policies the District may discipline any individual who retaliates against any person who reports alleged violations of this policy. The District may also discipline any individual who retaliates against any participant in an investigation, proceeding or hearing relating to the report of alleged violations. Retaliation includes, but is not limited to, any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment.

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