



CITY OF HOUSTON

**Annise D. Parker
City Controller**

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau

Performance Audit

Submitted by:
Mir•Fox & Rodriguez, P.C.
One Riverway, Suite 1900
Houston, Texas 77056
September 16, 2005

**Mir•Fox
&
Rodriguez, P.C.**
Certified Public Accountants
Report No.: 05-30



OFFICE OF THE CITY CONTROLLER
CITY OF HOUSTON
TEXAS

ANNISE D. PARKER

October 6, 2005

The Honorable Bill White, Mayor
City of Houston, Texas

SUBJECT: Fire Department Life Safety Bureau-Performance Audit (Report No. 05-30)

Dear Mayor White:

I am pleased to submit to you this independent Performance Audit of the Fire Department Life Safety Bureau's (Bureau) operational activities that was conducted by Mir Fox & Rodriguez, P.C. (MFR). The primary objectives of the engagement included examining and assessing operational practices, resources, technology tools, and training practices to provide recommendations for improving the coordination, efficiency and effectiveness of Bureau functions and assessing the Bureau's structure and management practices to help ensure resources are being utilized as effectively as possible. MFR also conducted an employee survey and held voluntary focus group sessions with employees to assess operational functions and performance.

The report identified observations, recommendations, commendations, and areas where cost savings could be experienced. Recommendations for improvement were noted in such areas as operational management; training; the computer data system; the quality control program; building/occupancy inspections; communication and specialty equipment; fleet; and permit fees. Draft copies of the matters contained in the report were provided to the Bureau and the Fire Chief. The views of the responsible officials as to actions being taken are appended to the report as Exhibit I.

We enjoyed working with the Bureau employees and appreciate their complete cooperation with MFR during this audit.

Respectfully submitted,

Annise D. Parker
City Controller

xc: City Council Members
Anthony Hall, Chief Administrative Officer
Michael Moore, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Phil Boriskie, Fire Chief, Fire Department
Judy Gray Johnson, Director, Finance and Administration Department

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September 16, 2005

The Honorable Annise D. Parker
City Controller
City of Houston
901 Bagby, 8th Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Re: Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Dear Controller Parker:

Mir•Fox & Rodriguez, P.C. (MFRPC) has completed the performance audit of the City of Houston (City) Fire Department's (HFD) Life Safety Bureau (Bureau) as outlined in our engagement letter dated February 16, 2005 under Contract No. 56546, approved by City Council Ordinance No. 04-1296.

The purpose of our audit was to assess the Bureau's operational practices, resources, technology tools, training practices, organizational structure and management practices to help ensure that the functions and resources are being utilized as effectively and efficiently as possible.

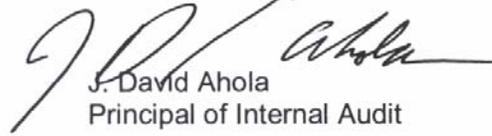
Based on our audit, we believe the Bureau lacks operational leadership, the necessary information to manage the daily operations, adequate information technology support, the proper equipment to communicate and perform inspections, and the funding to correct these deficiencies.

Our observations, issues, communications, cost savings and, recommendations noted during the independent assessment of the Bureau are presented in this report. Our procedures, which accomplished the primary objectives, were performed through June 29, 2005 and have not been updated since that date. Our observations included in this report are the only matters that came to our attention based on the procedures performed.

This report is intended solely for the information and use of the City and the Controller's Office, and is not intended to be used for any other purpose. MFRPC is pleased to have been given the opportunity to work on this engagement and we appreciate the cooperation received from your office, HFD and the Bureau.

Very truly yours,

Mir•Fox & Rodriguez, P.C.



J. David Ahola
Principal of Internal Audit

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

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Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Executive Summary

MFRPC was engaged to conduct a performance audit of the Bureau by the City Controller in an engagement letter dated February 16, 2005 pursuant to Contract No. 56546, approved by City Council Ordinance No. 04-1296.

Scope and Objectives

The purpose of this performance audit was to perform an independent assessment of the Bureau by examining operational areas within the Bureau. The engagement began February 18, 2005 and the field work was concluded June 29, 2005. The primary objectives included the following:

- Examine and assess operational practices, resources, technology tools, and training practices to provide recommendations for improving the coordination, efficiency and effectiveness of Bureau functions.
- Assess the Bureau's structure and management practices to help ensure all available resources are being utilized as effectively as possible.
- Provide practical recommendations for improving the quality of the processes and the overall cost efficiency and deployment of resources related to Bureau operations.
- Determine the overall adequacy of the systems of internal control as related to the Bureau's processes.

Assessment

This performance audit is the third operational review of the Bureau within the last ten years. Each of the previous reviews (Abbey Study in 1996 and Tri Data Study in 1999) identified significant accomplishments and weaknesses in the operation of HFD and the Bureau. Additionally, the Maximus Fee Study in 2001 reviewed the City's Permit Fee structure and recommended a change in the manner to which permit fee amounts were set. The permit fee process was never changed. MFRPC has observed similar issues addressed in the previous studies and has also identified new issues. The significant issues, observations and recommendations we identified are as follows:

1. Issue: Ineffective operational management

Observation: The daily operation of the Bureau is the responsibility of the Assistant Fire Marshall. The management style of the current Assistant Fire Marshal has permitted overtime abuses to occur, created an atmosphere of mistrust and fear of retribution which has permeated throughout the Bureau. The overtime abuses were limited to the Assistant Fire Marshall's office. Many chief inspectors and senior inspectors work behind closed doors of their offices.

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Recommendation: The Fire Chief in conjunction with the Fire Marshall should take steps to eliminate or correct the prevailing management style to foster an open door policy throughout the Bureau, get the supervisors out of their offices and into the field and afford them the ability to communicate with the inspectors.

2. Issue: Inadequate professional and job related training

Observation: The Bureau is expected to be operated similar to a business, yet there is no management training and little job related training provided. Inspectors find themselves promoted to senior inspector and beyond, yet are not provided with the necessary management training to accomplish that for which they are held accountable. Funding for travel for professional training including conferences was not authorized.

Recommendation: A review of the Bureau's training requirements be made to establish levels of inspector proficiency while incorporating basic management and people skills training. These should be tied to promotion standards. A Bureau Training Plan should then be developed to ensure all inspectors meet the minimum requirements for their position. Consideration should be given for individuals to be voluntary participants in basic management and people skills training, in preparation for the next position prior to testing for that position.

Funding should be provided annually to permit one chief inspector and at least two senior inspectors the opportunity to attend fire prevention professional conferences. Consideration should also be made to support the expenses for the Bureau to provide a representative to the International Code Council (ICC).

3. Issue: Inadequate computer data system

Observation: Inspectors have not been provided the means to record building/occupancy inspections while working in the field. They must return to their offices to input inspection results into a Microsoft Access Database (homemade computer) database. In addition, this homemade computer database was developed within the Bureau by a chief inspector that happened to have certain knowledge of computer databases. The Bureau plans to replace the homemade database with the City Planning and Development Department's Integrated Land Management System (ILMS) which already has 1,200 users and is 14 years old. The ILMS is being modified to accommodate certain needs of the Bureau. Over the past several years the Bureau has approached their computer system needs on a piecemeal basis, and it is our understanding that the ILMS will not meet many of the management related needs of the Bureau.

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Recommendations: Evaluate the functionality of ILMS for appropriateness; costs related to implementation, peripheral equipment and training; the ability to interface with the inspector in the field utilizing standardized inspection checklists; and its capability to provide timely and meaningful management reports to HFD and Bureau management. Phase I of ILMS is not fully deployed and the benefits have not been adequately realized within the Bureau. Phase II should also be conducted, as it includes the use of outdated equipment for field operations.

If the evaluation of the ILMS is satisfactory, then the City should ensure that the implementation is adequately funded.

If the evaluation indicates that the ILMS is not a good economic and/or operational fit for the Bureau, then an appropriate building/occupancy inspection scheduling and tracking system needs to be identified, funded, procured and implemented so the Bureau can operate and be managed in the most cost effective manner.

4. Issue: Critical lack of an integrated management reporting system

Observation: Current reporting is predominantly manual and the Bureau does not have an integrated information system to facilitate management reporting.

Recommendation: Implement a computerized management reporting system to provide HFD and Bureau management with complete and meaningful daily, weekly and monthly reports which will enable them to better manage the Bureau.

5. Issue: Incomplete building/occupancy inspection database

Observation: The Bureau has inadequate information to determine if the Bureau's occupancy inspection goals related to high rise buildings and hazardous material have been met. The listing of high rise buildings and hazardous materials occupancies in the homemade database is incomplete. In addition, certain buildings/occupancies subject to inspection that were listed in the Bureau's previous old databases were never transformed to the homemade database. As a result there is a risk that certain high rises and hazardous materials in the City are not being subjected to the Bureau's inspections.

Recommendation: To develop a complete listing of high rise building and hazardous material locations that are subject to the Bureau's periodic inspections, the contents of the old computer systems need to be compared to the contents of the homemade computer system.

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6. Issue: Lack of a comprehensive quality control program

Observation: The Bureau does not have a quality control program to ensure that the quality of the building/occupancy inspections are consistent. In addition, the quality of the information in the homemade database is not adequate because the data that is imported into the database is not verified.

Recommendations: The Bureau should develop a quality control program to ensure the quality and consistency of building/occupancy inspections, and subsequent recording of inspection information.

The Bureau should develop a process to review and, if necessary, correct the information contained in the current database to verify the accuracy and completeness of the building/occupancy inspection related data.

7. Issue: Lack of standardization in building/occupancy inspections

Observation: Many inspectors, with the same inspection requirements, do not use a standardized inspection checklist. Inconsistent inspections are occurring and, as a result, the Bureau is providing less than adequate service to Houston's citizens.

Recommendation: Bureau Teams, as part of the Quality Control Program, should develop a standard building/occupancy checklist for each building/occupancy type, and ensure that the revised checklists are used for the applicable building/occupancy being inspected. The checklist should also include the inspector's name, date of inspection, arrival time, departure time, building/occupancy contacts, name, telephone numbers and locations, inspector comments and supervisor comments. The inspection reports should cite specific code violation references, and be reviewed by the inspector's immediate supervisor.

8. Issue: Lack of communication and specialty equipment.

Observation: Many inspectors do not have basic equipment, such as cell phones, pagers, messaging equipment etc., to perform their jobs and/or communicate with their supervisors. In the case of a Special Events coverage, radios are not available to facilitate the on duty inspector's constant direct communication with all emergency services. In addition, a City policy restricts multiple means of communication being issued to inspectors.

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Recommendations: The communication requirements of all inspectors should be evaluated to determine whether they require radios, cell phones, pagers, two-way pagers or some other communication device(s). Once determined, sufficient communication devices should be obtained and issued to permit both emergency and routine communications. Certain inspectors may require more than one communication device.

As part of a needs analysis a survey should be conducted of all members of the Bureau to determine the equipment required to perform their inspections. The same results should be compared to the equipment actually available. Consolidate the requirements and determine the equipment shortfalls, if any. Develop a plan to acquire the necessary equipment. Have inspectors assume responsibility and be accountable for all equipment issued. Specialty equipment should be maintained at a central location and be signed out when necessary for the conduct of certain inspections.

9. Issue: Wasting of assets

Observation: 93 Fujitsu Notepad computers and related equipment were purchased in June 1999 for \$471,652 on the recommendation of the Abbey Study. Approximately 80 of them have not been unpacked from their original boxes because they cannot be used without additional software. The software was requested by the Bureau in the FY 2001, 2002 and 2003 budgets but not funded by HFD or the City. The Bureau determined that the Fujitsu Notepad computers were outdated and of little, if any, value in the FY 2004 budget documents. This had previously been addressed by HFD and was not successfully resolved.

Recommendation: An investigation be conducted to determine: the cause of the lack of use of the Fujitsu Notepad computers; if any malfeasance occurred; if the computers are still useful to the Bureau; if not, then recommend appropriate disposition of the equipment. The Bureau should also develop procedures to prevent any reoccurrence.

10. Issue: Inadequate procedures to communicate critical information

Observation: Inspectors were not made aware of properly issued subpoenas by their management in sufficient time to allow for the inspector's attendance in court. There were 55 instances (8%) where an inspector failed to appear in court, and a reason was not given.

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Recommendation: The Bureau should develop lines of communication with applicable courts and determine if email notification of subpoenas is possible. If so, the Bureau needs to develop a process to obtain the subpoenas from the courts, and deliver them to the appropriate inspector in sufficient time to allow for the inspector's appearance in court.

11. Issue: An aging fleet

Observation: The Bureau has 84 vehicles, 68% of the fleet, which exceeds the City's Vehicle Replacement criteria. As of December 31, 2004 the 84 vehicles have in excess of 122,000 miles on average.

Recommendation: The Bureau in conjunction with HFD and other City Departments should develop a plan to either replace existing Bureau high mileage vehicles with more reliable existing City vehicles or "fast track" the Bureau's vehicle replacement schedule.

12. Issue: Inadequate permit fees charged

Observation: The Bureau conducts numerous inspections related to the City's permits; however, the current fee structure does not cover all costs incurred by the City to conduct those inspections. The City's annual FY budget preparation guidance document indicates that Permit Fees are to be reviewed each year. The last review was conducted in 2002 with FY 2001 cost information.

The City's Executive Order No. 1-38: Accounts Receivable Policy (effective September 1, 2003) requires City Departments to annually review its charges for providing services to customers and citizens, Paragraph 3.4.2.

Recommendation: The Bureau, HFD, and the City should review the existing permit fee structure to ensure that the Bureau is charging the appropriate fees for their services.

Commendations

MFRPC would like to commend the following:

- Fire Chief Phil Boriske - For the time and effort he provided throughout the Performance Audit.
- Fire Marshall E. A. Corral - For the demonstrated dedication and devotion to the citizens of the City of Houston for the last 50 years.

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- Chief Inspector Charles Key - For his efforts in the creation and maintenance of the Bureau's existing homemade computer database.
- The Permit Compliance Group - MFRPC would like to commend Deputy Chief Mike Ivy, Chief Inspector George Meadows and Administrative Manager Diane Alcala. These members' vision and oversight are directly responsible for the overall success of the program. Their efforts have surpassed the budgeted permit revenue of \$2.3 million by 65% to \$3.8 million for fiscal year 2005.

Cost Savings

Although specific cost saving amounts could not be identified, the Bureau can experience cost savings by:

- Continuing to allow all inspection personnel to drive their assigned vehicles home instead of back to their assigned office locations. This will facilitate inspection personnel to spend more time in the field conducting inspections. In most cases, there is insufficient space and security for parked vehicles at the office locations.
- Efficiencies can be gained by standardizing the inspection checklists and implementing a comprehensive Quality Control program.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Background

Historical: The Congress of the Republic of Texas granted in 1837 the City of Houston its first charter. The State of Texas Legislature established in 1905 the Houston Fire Department by granting the City of Houston a charter. Article II, § 8 of the Houston City Charter states, “The City of Houston shall have power to provide means for the protection against and the extinguishment of conflagrations, and for the regulation, maintenance and support of the fire department....”

Houston City Council passed on May 5, 1943 Ordinance #5198 that redefined the Houston Fire Department. This very comprehensive ordinance repealed all previous ordinances, and established job titles, functions and salaries for the Houston Fire Department.

The 1947 Texas Legislature enacted Article 1269m, Vernon’s Texas Civil Statutes that provided for a civil service system for police and fire fighters. The voters of Houston adopted this Act in 1948.

Article 1269m, Vernon’s Texas Civil Statutes, were re-codified as the Texas Local Government Code in 1987. The “Meet and Confer” legislation of 1993 has since been superseded by Collective Bargaining legislation which was passed by Houston voters in 2004.

There are also other laws and ordinances that the Fire Marshal’s Office operates under, including the State of Texas Government Code Section 417 - State Fire Marshal, City of Houston Code of Ordinances Chapter 34 - Police and Fire Protection, City of Houston Fire Code, City of Houston Building Code and the State of Texas Government Code Section Chapter 143 - Municipal Civil Service. Additionally, the Bureau has adopted Performance Goals and Standards governing their own operations.

Bureau’s Mission: The mission of the Bureau is to provide the City of Houston the highest level of fire hazard prevention and safety education along with comprehensive fire and life safety inspections through aggressive, but equitable, code enforcement.

Bureau’s Composition: The Bureau and the Arson Bureau are under the direction of the Fire Marshal, E. A. Corral. Chief Corral first earned the position of Fire Marshal in 1981 by testing as a Chief Inspector and scoring the highest on the promotional exam for this position. In 1992, Chief Corral was appointed as Fire Chief of the Houston Fire Department by newly elected mayor, Bob Lanier. Chief Corral served in that role until 1998, and then returned to the position of Fire Marshal. Chief Corral is one of four (4) Assistant Chiefs reporting to Fire Chief Phil Boriskie, who was appointed by Mayor Bill White and confirmed by City Council on May 26, 2004.

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The Bureau addresses its mission through the activities of over 100 Inspectors assigned (see Attachment A, HFD Fire Prevention Command Organization Chart.) The Bureau is divided into nine teams, eight of which conduct inspections. These teams include:

- Administrative (General Office, Clerical Staff, Records Administration)
- Special Operations (Special Complaints, Festivals, Trade Shows, Airports, LP-Gas) (see Attachment B)
- High-Rise (Inspection and Evacuation Training) (see Attachment C)
- Public Education (General Fire Safety Programs) (see Attachment D)
- Institutional (Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Personal Care, Jails, Adult Day Care) (see Attachment E)
- R.A.G.E. (Residential, Assembly, General, Educational) - City is divided in quadrants and there are five R.A.G.E. Teams that provide support. (see Attachments B, D, F and G)
- Weekend & Nights (Complaints, Night Clubs, Permits) (see Attachment B)
- Plan Checking (Plans Review and On-site inspections) (see Attachment H)
- Hazardous Material Inspection Team (HMIT) and Permit Compliance Group (PCG) (see Attachment I)

For Attachments B through I noted above, we have included excerpts from the overview and needs assessment reports that were prepared by each of the eight inspection teams in advance of the audit at the request of the Assistant Fire Marshall.

Each of these ten teams has one or more Senior Inspectors who represent the front line management of that team. The Senior Inspectors report to seven (7) Chief Inspector positions which in turn are managed by the Assistant Fire Marshal who reports directly to the Fire Marshal. The Hazardous Materials team is under the budget and authority of the Fire Marshal, but has been realigned in physical and managerial responsibility under the Assistant Chief in charge of Homeland Security.

Each team of inspectors is trained to inspect a specific occupancy type, and is under the direction of a Chief Inspector and a Senior Inspector who functions as a field supervisor. The number of inspectors assigned to each team is designed to provide adequate staffing with the intent to reach an overall goal of inspecting occupancies in a timely manner.

While each of these teams focus on specialized types of occupancies (buildings) and events, they all share a common understanding of the International Fire Code which is the underlying basis of their fire prevention activities. At various times, all of the members of the different teams will work together on certain events, such as the annual Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the National Football League Super Bowl Game, the baseball All-Star Game, School inspections during the month of October, and Shopping Mall inspections in November and December.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Bureau Personnel Selection: Fire inspectors in the Bureau are selected from an eligibility list as a result of a written civil service examination. To be eligible for the examination, a member must have served for a minimum of two years in HFD as an engineer/operator. A promotional list is created after the examination which ranks members according to their test score plus points assigned for years of seniority. Promotions are made as positions are vacated or created.

All members promoted to Inspector are required by state law to attend the State Fire Inspector Certification course. Once promoted to Fire Inspector, the rank structure advances to Senior Inspector, Chief Inspector, Assistant Fire Marshal and Fire Marshal.

HFD Accreditation: HFD has voluntarily sought, and in 2001 obtained, accreditation from The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI). HFD is the largest fire department in the world to obtain this accreditation. The CFAI program provides a comprehensive system of fire and emergency service self-assessment and evaluation that can help local governments determine their risks and fire safety needs, evaluate the performance of the organizations involved, and provide a method for continuous improvement. The CFAI can elevate the professionalism and level of service delivery within the fire and emergency services. Accreditation is valid for a period of five years. To renew accreditation status, the agency shall be required to submit a revised copy of the self assessment documents to the Commission, and successfully complete an on-site peer assessment visit.

Bureau Locations: The majority of the Bureau is located in the office of the Fire Marshal at 2931 W. 12th Street. Additionally, there are four (4) satellite offices. The Plan Checking function is located with the City of Houston Building Department at 3300 Main Street. The Sector B – Southwest R.A.G.E. Team offices in leased space at 5300 N. Braeswood #60, and another R.A.G.E. Team from this sector offices at Station 70 at 11410 Beamer Road in Southeast Houston. Two R.A.G.E. Teams in Sector C office at Station 75 at 1995 S. Dairy Ashford Road in Southwest Houston. The Hazardous Material Inspection Team is located at 1205 Dart, Fire Department Headquarters.

Budget: The Bureau has operated within budgetary constraints for both FY 2004 and 2005. It was budgeted \$9.66 million for Fiscal Year 2004, and expended \$9.29 million, in Fiscal Year 2005, the Bureau was budgeted \$10.79 million and expended \$9.62 million. The difference between budgeted and expended for both periods was the incomplete spending for overtime funds allocated.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Previous Studies: There have been numerous studies regarding the HFD, and in particular, the Bureau. The last three are of prime importance to this performance audit. The Abbey Study and the Tri Data Study were studies that focused on the operations of the HFD and Bureau. The Abbey Study only focused on the Bureau, while the Tri Data focused on the entire HFD. The last study, the Maximus Fee Study, focused on the permit fees charged by the City of Houston.

Abbey Study: An Internal Work Demands Analysis Study Committee evaluated the Bureau in 1996. Consequently, in March 1996, the City of Houston contracted with Abbey Group Consultants to provide consulting and application development services for a fire prevention system. The report from the Abbey Group Consultants recommended the implementation of a computerized inspection report program that would generate notices of violation. The recommendations were the result of a study that documented that a large amount of the inspector's time was spent handwriting notices of violation for delivery to business occupants. A pen-based computerized notepad was suggested as the answer for greater time management in the creation of inspection notices. It is our understanding that a total of approximately \$459,675 was paid to the Abbey Group, from March 1996 through October 1997, for the design and development of software, and for a consulting contract. An additional \$471,652 was spent to purchase the hardware and peripheral equipment required to support the Abbey Group's recommendations. The hardware and equipment was delivered in June 1999.

Tri Data Study: In December 1999, the Tri Data Corporation was awarded a contract for a management study of the Fire Department. The study was a comprehensive review of the management and organization structure, personnel, command, control, and staffing levels. In October 2000, the Tri Data Study was completed. The Study listed 211 recommendations for HFD with the Bureau having 32 of the 211 recommendations.

For the initial response to the Tri-Data Study Report, the Bureau prepared a response, and forwarded it to HFD. HFD then prepared their responses to the same numbered items listed in the report, and submitted them. The two responses did not always agree nor were they always accurate. For example the August 2001 response to item 14 was as follows:

“Consideration should be given to using the Planning Department computer system as an interim solution for prevention inspection reporting.”

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August 2001 Reply

AGREE – HFD is currently in the process of acquiring the Integrated Land Management System. Planning and Development currently uses this computer system. This system will be used to access current information of buildings permitted by the City of Houston, and will greatly enhance the Houston Fire Department's ability to track and sort inspection data. Plans are to provide each inspector with a laptop computer with the ability to dock at workstations provided at Stations #70, 75, Braesmont and West 12th. The hardware has been acquired.

Each laptop can be connected to a monitor. All reports will be standardized. Permits not approved can be flagged both from the Building Department and HFD. The Permit Office will process all permit renewals, and renewals can be faxed or mailed to the business owner. The Permit Office will also have the ability to electronically send permit billing to the business owner, and expired permit information will be electronically forwarded to each substation daily. The estimated time to implement this program is January 2002. The approximate cost will be \$100,000. In the meantime, we will compile data by hand.

August 2002 Reply

This recommendation has been partially implemented. The LSB is currently in the process of acquiring the Integrated Land Management System from the Planning and Development Department. The estimated time to implement this program is January 2003 with an approximate initial cost of \$150,000. There were delays due to software modifications.

The problem with the response as we understand it is:

1. The plan to equip each inspector with a tablet did not materialize as the integration software was not purchased.
2. Reports have not been standardized.
3. The ILMS implementation was to be accomplished January 2003; the implementation is currently estimated to be in February 2006.

Maximus Fee Study: DMG-Maximus, Inc. was contracted by the City to perform a study of the permit fees being charged by the City and the cost related to perform the inspections, per Ordinance 2001-0679 on July 11, 2001. According to City yearly budget guidance, the City is to review permit fees on an annual basis. The last review was performed in 2002 using data from year Fiscal Year 2001. As a result, the fees that are currently charged by the Bureau are based on four year old data.

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Audit Approach

Objectives and Scope: The primary objectives for this engagement include the following for the Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit:

- Examine and assess operational practices, resources, technology tools, and training practices to provide recommendations for improving the coordination, efficiency and effectiveness of Bureau functions.
- Assess the organization's structure and management practices to help ensure all available resources are being utilized as effectively as possible.
- Provide practical recommendations for improving the quality of the processes and the overall cost efficiency and deployment of resources related to Bureau operations.
- Determine the overall adequacy of the Bureau's systems of internal control as related to the Bureau's processes.

To accomplish the objectives and scope noted above, MFRPC conducted the performance audit in four phases, planning, preliminary survey, fieldwork and reporting.

Planning

MFRPC began with an entrance conference with the City of Houston's Fire Department and Life Safety Bureau personnel as well as representatives from the City Controller's office. During the planning phase, MFRPC gathered information from appropriate sources necessary to accomplish the objectives. Based on the information received during the planning phase, MFRPC modified the detailed internal audit plan and related budget pursuant to the Performance Audit of the Bureau.

Preliminary Survey

In the preliminary survey phase of the engagement, MFRPC's primary purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding of the Bureau's processes. MFRPC compared actual performance to applicable standards and actual expenditures to allowable budget. MFRPC reviewed Bureau procedures and then related operational records, such as overtime procedures and related accumulated overtime pay records.

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Fieldwork

The fieldwork phase consisted primarily of detailed transaction testing of the payroll policies and procedures and related payroll records of the Bureau. MFRPC reviewed the Bureau's policies and procedures to ensure that they were adequate and complied with Federal and, state law, codes and City ordinances. MFRPC also conducted an employee survey as well as focus groups to discuss the results of the employee survey. As potential and significant audit issues were identified, MFRPC auditors drafted Internal Audit Memorandums (IAMs). The IAMs were provided to the Bureau's management for verification of the facts. The IAMs served as the basis for the issues noted in this audit report.

Reporting

At the conclusion of the fieldwork for the Bureau, MFRPC prepared and issued a draft report containing certain observations, issues, commendations, cost savings, and recommendations. From this draft report, the Bureau formulated an implementation plan to incorporate the recommendations into the processes of the Bureau. MFRPC issued the final report that includes issues, observations, recommendations, commendations, cost savings and the Bureau's final implementation plan developed in cooperation with the Bureau's management.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

During the conduct of our performance review we identified certain issues that we believe should be brought to the attention of HFD's management as follows:

I. Ineffective operational management

Observation

The Assistant Fire Marshall is responsible for the daily operations of the Bureau. His leadership style has permitted overtime abuses to occur, fostered a lack of trust which permeated the entire Bureau, created an atmosphere not conducive to the accomplishment of the Bureau's goals, and caused many to fear retribution for voicing ideas contrary to his. The overtime abuses were limited to his office.

Sound business practices dictate effective organizations must have sound leadership, responsive both to job accomplishment, and the needs of the individual workers. It's the leaders who set the tone for the organization.

It would appear, the Bureau has operated without an effective top manager for a number of years. It is believed the Fire Marshall was kept out of the loop on the day-to-day operation of the Bureau. Information was either not passed to the Fire Marshall, or it was sanitized to the point of not relating certain relevant facts. Chief inspectors and senior inspectors did not come forward as they feared retribution. Many of them remained behind closed office doors. Another primal cause would be the existing promotion system. An individual is promoted because of their score on a test. Little, if any, management training is made available after they pass the test.

Recommendation

The Fire Chief in conjunction with the Fire Marshall should take steps to eliminate or correct the prevailing management style to foster an open door policy throughout the Bureau, get the supervisors out of the offices and into the field, and afford them the ability to communicate with the inspectors.

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II. Inadequate professional and job related training

Observation

The Bureau is expected to be operated similar to a business, yet management training has not been made available to inspectors, senior inspectors and chief inspectors. Our field testing indicated that all inspectors received the mandated 20 hours of professional training during fiscal year 2004; however, inspectors find themselves promoted to senior inspector and beyond, yet are not provided with the necessary management training to accomplish that for which they are held accountable.

There are also many national conferences that would be of great benefit for the senior inspectors and chief inspectors to attend to maintain their proficiency within the profession, bring the experience home and share the information, and place Houston at the forefront of fire prevention policy making. Unfortunately, this is not possible as the funding for travel for professional training including conferences is not authorized.

Recommendations

A review of the Bureau's training requirements be made to establish levels of inspector proficiency, while incorporating basic management and people skills training. A Bureau Training Plan should then be developed to ensure all inspectors meet the minimum requirements for their position. Consideration should be given for individuals to be voluntary participants in basic management and people skills training in preparation for the next position prior to testing for that position.

Funding should be provided annually to permit one chief inspector and at least two senior inspectors the opportunity to attend fire prevention professional conferences. Consideration should also be made to support the expenses for the Bureau to provide a representative to the International Code Council (ICC).

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III. Inadequate computer data system

Observation

Inspectors have not been provided with a means to record building/occupancy inspections while still in the field. Inspectors must return to their offices to input inspection results into a homemade computer database through outdated computer hardware. The planned replacement, with the City's Planning and Development Department's Integrated Land Management System (ILMS), already has 1,200 users, is 14 years old, and still will not permit remote recording of inspection information into the system with existing equipment and programs.

Sound business practices dictate that for maximum efficiency, workers should be provided with sufficient tools and equipment to perform their job.

With the failure of the Abbey Group to provide the "Automated Life Safety System", the Bureau continues to lack the appropriate means to schedule, track and manage inspections. The Bureau turned to the Building Department for assistance. A fixed bid contract was awarded to Gartek Technology (\$150,000) to make ILMS modifications on behalf of the Bureau. These modifications (adding screens and fields to the database) would better support the Bureau's inspectors in maintaining data on various inspection activities. The Building Department's role was to document the design requirements, and provide oversight to the development project.

The ILMS modifications were not designed as a "complete replacement" for Bureau's current inspection system. It was to augment the department's existing processes and ultimately to provide some of the same benefits derived by the Department's building inspectors, namely:

1. Accountability - providing activity logs and audit trails
2. Performance Measures - better tracking of work activity by property address
3. Revenue Management - billing, invoice and renewal management
4. Increase efficiency through wireless field system
5. Statistical Analysis and Management Reports

These benefits can only be realized by having sufficient historical data and current operational processes that allow meaningful management reports to be generated as well as workloads and performance to be monitored. While the software will provide these capabilities, there is no operational plan for implementation, system migration, training, support, and maintenance to take full advantage of these capabilities.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Recommendations

Evaluate the use of ILMS for appropriateness; costs related to implementation, peripheral equipment and training; the ability to interface with the inspector in the field utilizing standardized inspection checklists; and its ability to provide timely and meaningful management reports to HFD and Bureau management. Phase I of ILMS is not fully deployed and the benefits have not been adequately realized within the Bureau. Phase II should be reviewed in depth as it incorporates the use of outdated equipment for field operations.

If the evaluation of Phase II implementation indicates the ILMS is cost effective, appropriate, meets the needs of the Bureau inspector in the field without burdening current users and overloading the system, and provides Bureau management with timely information and meaningful reports, then the ILMS project (Phase I and II) needs a fully funded operational plan developed to maximize its returns on investment.

If the evaluation indicates ILMS is not a good economic and/or operational fit for the Bureau, then an appropriate building/occupancy inspection scheduling and tracking system needs to be identified, funded, procured and implemented so the Bureau can operate and be managed in the most cost effective manner.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

IV. Critical lack of an integrated complete management reporting system

Observation

Current reporting is predominantly manual, and the Bureau does not have an integrated systems to provide managerial information. Each inspector is required to complete a daily activity report detailing where they were for every hour of the day and submit it to their senior inspector. Many inspectors see this exercise as a futile attempt to manage the Bureau as no one checks the validity of the report.

At the present time, the senior and chief inspectors cannot be certain where their inspectors are at any given time and even if they are performing the inspections they are reporting as completed. It has been rumored that some inspectors “pencil in” their inspections, that is, write the inspections without even visiting the building/occupancy; we, however, could not verify or deny the rumor.

Recommendation

Implement a computerized management reporting system to provide HFD and Bureau management with complete and meaningful daily, weekly and monthly reports which will enable them to manage the Bureau.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

V. Incomplete building/occupancy inspection database

Observation

The Bureau has the goals of inspecting each high rise building occupancy and hazardous material building occupancy every two years. These goals cannot be measured as there is inadequate information to confirm if the current homemade database contains all buildings/occupancies required to be inspected.

Some buildings, such as Schools, High Rise Buildings, Day Care Facilities, Hospitals and Nursing Homes, have been identified and included in the databases for inspection. It cannot be determined that all of the other buildings requiring fire and safety inspections have been identified and included in the database.

Early database information from the Bull and Armor systems was not migrated to the subsequent databases. Existing Access databases were developed locally as budget requests for Information Technology support (hardware, software and technical support) have not been funded. The Bureau has made the previous database from the Bull and Armor system available to the ILMS team, but does not have the technical skills required to migrate this information to the ILMS. Additions and deletions from the global population of buildings requiring inspection have not been tracked in the intervening periods.

Recommendation

There should be a determination as to the most cost effective method to incorporate data stored in the present homemade database (and if possible the Bull and Armor databases) into the new computer system. If this is not possible, then the Bureau should compare all buildings/occupancies in the new database, to the homemade database, and reconcile any variances.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

VI. Lack of a comprehensive quality control program

Observation

There is not an existing quality control program for building/occupancy inspections, and the information input into the existing homemade database is not verified. Without a quality control program and the active involvement of management in the conduct of the inspections, there can be little faith in the veracity of the information contained in the existing database.

Sound businesses have a quality control function incorporated into all operational practices. This is to ensure a sub-standard product is not delivered to the customer. The Bureau performs no quality checks of their building/occupancy, inspectors and does not follow up with its customers. Further, no one reconciles the information input into the database from the inspection reports with the inspection reports.

Recommendations

The Bureau should develop a quality control program to ensure the quality and consistency of building/occupancy inspections and subsequent recording of inspection information.

The Bureau should develop a process to review and, if necessary, correct the information contained in the current database to verify the accuracy and completeness or the building/occupancy inspection related data.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

VII. Lack of standardization in building/occupancy inspections

Observation

All Bureau inspection teams use checklists to aid them in the performance of inspections. Some Chief and Senior Inspectors have provided their team members certain inspection checklists that they favor, but don't require each inspector to utilize the inspection checklist.

Because there is no requirement to use a specific building/occupancy inspection checklist, individual inspectors have altered or tailored provided inspection checklists to their own preferences. As a result, there is inconsistency in the performance of specific occupancy inspections and, therefore, no guarantee that all fire prevention deficiencies are identified and subsequently corrected. Current requirements do not necessitate the listing of the time spent inspecting an occupancy on the inspection checklist, and there is no occupancy inspection quality control program.

When an inspector completes an occupancy inspection checklist, the supervisor cannot determine if all fire prevention deficiencies were identified at the building/occupancy, or even if the location was ever visited. In addition, many inspectors voiced disapproval of the requirement to list the activity performed for each hour of the day on the daily activity report.

Recommendation

Bureau Teams, as part of the Quality Control Program, should develop a standard building/occupancy checklist for each building/occupancy type, and ensure that the revised checklists are used for the applicable building/occupancy being inspected. The checklists should include at a minimum: inspector's name, date of inspection, arrival time, departure time, building/occupancy contacts, name, telephone numbers and locations, inspector comments and supervisor comments. The inspection reports should cite specific code violation references, and be reviewed by the inspector's immediate supervisor.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

VIII. Lack of communication and specialty equipment

Observation

Some inspectors and senior inspectors are not issued radios, cell phones and/or two way pagers, and, therefore, do not have immediate communications capability without using personal cell phones. Many also lack the basic equipment to perform building/occupancy inspections.

Inspectors, due to the possible dangers involved in the conduct of building/occupancy inspections, should always have communications capability and the equipment necessary to conduct the inspections.

Inspectors not provided cell phones have been instructed to stop at fire stations and use their telephones when necessary. Inspectors (that do not have personal cell telephones or chose not to use them) do not have the ability to communicate with their supervisors, or any other individual, when an emergency or normal situation arises requiring them to do so.

As Uniformed Officers in marked vehicles, inspectors are sometimes called on by the public to assist in emergency situations, and they do not have a means of contacting the appropriate city department for assistance. Further, there are many instances where more than one means of communication is necessary. For example, in the Hospital District, cell phones must be turned off. In these circumstances, pagers and/or two-way pagers are also needed. During the performance of occupancy inspections, it may happen that the inspector finds himself in a fire stairwell and unable to reenter the building's floors. Without a cell phone to notify building management or his supervisor, the inspector could be caught in the stairwell until someone notices.

The Life Safety and Fire Prevention Bureau of the Houston Fire Department is mandated by the City of Houston Fire Code to provide Fire Inspectors to work stand-by assignments at specified public assembly occupancies and large public events.

This type of function occurs on a routine basis at sporting events, pyrotechnic displays, festivals and other event where a large number of people are present.

An example of this occurred during the 2004 Super Bowl played at Reliant Stadium. While working the pyrotechnic display for the halftime show, the Chief Inspector found the pyrotechnics area over run by the general public placing them in danger. Without the other Inspectors assigned to the event having communication devices, the Chief Inspector was unable to communicate the need for their immediate assistance to clear the area. Fortunately, the Chief Inspector was able to secure the performers security detail to assist him in clearing the area.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

The proper equipment for the inspector is either a radio, cell phone and a pager or a cell phone with radio capability and a pager. The radio provides the best instant communication with other inspectors at the event and the HEC. The pager is necessary to receive dispatch information and group pages. The cell phone provides a way to make the Inspector accessible to the event coordinators.

Other items such as fire code manuals, measuring wheels, and key maps have been included in recent budget requests, yet not been funded.

Recommendation

The communication requirements of all inspectors should be evaluated to determine whether they require radios, cell phones, pagers, two-way pagers or some other communication device(s). Once determined, sufficient communication devices should be obtained and issued to permit both emergency and routine communications. It should be noted that some inspectors may require more than one communication device.

A survey should be conducted of all members of the Bureau to determine the equipment required to perform inspections and the equipment actually available. Consolidate the requirements and determine any equipment shortfalls. Develop a plan to acquire the necessary equipment. Have inspectors assume responsibility and be accountable for all equipment issued. Specialty equipment should be maintained at a central location, and be signed out when necessary for the conduct of inspections.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

IX. Wasting of assets

Observation

Ninety-three Fujitsu Notepad computers and related equipment were purchased in June 1999 for \$471,652 on the recommendation of the Abbey Study. Approximately 80 of them have not been unpacked from their original boxes because they cannot be used without additional software.

One of the tenants of government and business is assets are to be safeguarded.

It is our understanding that 93 Fujitsu Tablet Computers with peripheral equipment were purchased in June 1999 for \$471,652 at the recommendation of the Abbey Group. It is further our understanding that field testing was not conducted on these computers and equipment, and that the related software to operate these computers was not provided.

The computers cannot be used in the field because the screen can only be viewed in a dimly lit environment. This coupled with the lack of software to operate the computers rendered them to paper weight status and approximately 80 of them have sat in a file room collecting dust since they arrived.

Bureau requests for funding for the software to permit the use of these computers were cut from the final version of the budgets. In the FY 2004 Budget, the Bureau identified the Fujitsu Tablet Computers as obsolete, and requested funds for replacements. This has previously been brought to HFD's attention, and was not successfully resolved.



Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Recommendation

An investigation be conducted to determine: the cause of the lack of use of the Fujitsu Notepad computers; if any malfeasance occurred; if the computers are still useful to the Bureau; if not, then recommend appropriate disposition of the equipment. The Bureau should also develop procedures to prevent any reoccurrence.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

X. Insufficient procedures to communicate critical information

Observation

Inspectors were not made aware of properly issued subpoenas by their management in sufficient time to allow for the inspector's attendance in court. There were 55 instances (8%) where an inspector failed to appear, and a reason was not given.

One of management's primary responsibilities is to maintain lines of communication throughout the organization.

During the Preliminary Survey phase of Riding-A-Longs with inspectors, we were made aware of an instance where an inspector was notified via hand delivered fax of a required court appearance that had already been held the day before. The notice itself had a "Run Date" of 2/17/05 shown on it, which was 16 days before it was received in the inspector's office. It is not uncommon for the Bureau to receive subpoenas after the court date has passed. A review of available data for the period January 1, 2004 through April 29, 2005, revealed that 652 citations were issued by Bureau Inspectors and 55 (8%) instances where an inspector failed to show for the hearing and no excuse was given by the inspector. When an inspector is subpoenaed to appear in court to testify as a witness and the inspector fails to show up, the Municipal Court Judge will normally dismiss the citation. This can give the defendant the false impression that the violation of the Fire Code that he/she was cited for does not need to be corrected.

Failure to correct the violation exposes the defendant and others to potential property damage and/or loss of life. The inspector may, and normally does, return to the occupancy and follow up on the original citation, and is allowed by law to issue another citation if the violation has not been cleared. This often times creates a tense situation and causes otherwise unnecessary friction between the department and the citizens of the City.

Recommendation

The Bureau should develop lines of communication with applicable courts, and determine if email notification of subpoenas is possible. If so, the Bureau needs to develop a process to obtain the subpoenas from the courts, and deliver them to the appropriate inspector in sufficient time to allow for the inspector's appearance in court.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

XI. An aging fleet

Observation

The Bureau has 84 vehicles, 68% of the fleet ranging in model years 1991 through 1998, which exceed the City's Vehicle Replacement criteria and average in excess of 122,000 miles, as shown in the data provided as of December 31, 2004.

The current City of Houston vehicle replacement criteria requires that the odometer reading be over 95,000 miles and the age of the vehicle be over 1 ½ times the standard estimated life of that class of vehicle for that vehicle to be considered for replacement.

The Bureau has a fleet that includes vehicles ranging from 1991 through 2004 model years. We did not note any vehicles for model years 1992, 2000, 2001 and 2003 that were in the fleet. See table as follows:

Model Year	# of Vehicles	Total Vehicle Miles	Average Vehicle Mileage
1991	1	123,000	123,000
1993	27	3,795,940	140,590
1994	32	3,989,842	124,683
1995	1	94,177	94,177
1996	9	949,659	105,518
1997	9	879,602	97,734
1998	5	479,723	95,945
1999	11	862,438	78,403
2002	1	6,146	6,146
2004	28	276,171	9,863
Totals	124	11,456,698	92,393

There are 95 vehicles, or 77% of the fleet, that are 1999 model year and earlier. These vehicles average 117,625 miles each, and their total miles traveled is 11,174,381 as noted in the data provided as of December 31, 2004. The total fleet of 124 vehicles averages 92,393 miles.

Recommendation

The Bureau, in conjunction with HFD, and the City of Houston, develop a plan to either replace existing Bureau high mileage vehicles with more reliable existing City of Houston vehicles, or "fast track" the Bureau's vehicle replacement schedule.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

XII. Inadequate permit fees charged

Observation

The Bureau conducts numerous inspections related to the City's permits; however, the current fee structure does not cover all costs incurred by the City to conduct those inspections.

The Maximus Study recommended a fee structure to permit complete recapture of the costs expended to conduct the building/occupancy inspections. It is our understanding that there were two philosophical premises addressed in the City Council's discussion of the Study's recommendations: One - the City should be able to recoup all of the costs incurred in the conduct of building/occupancy inspections, and Two – the City has a duty to provide services to the tax paying public. A compromise was reached, and the present fee structure was adopted.

The City's annual FY budget preparation guidance document indicates that Permit Fees are to be reviewed each year. The last review was conducted in 2002 with FY 2001 cost information.

The City's Executive Order No. 1-38: Accounts Receivable Policy, which became effective September 1, 2003, requires each Department to annually review its charges for providing services to customers and citizens. HFD has not accomplished this.

Recommendation

The Bureau, HFD and the City should review the existing permit fee structure to ensure the Bureau is charging the appropriate fees for their services.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Employee Survey Results

We received 90 completed surveys from the 124 Bureau personnel for a 73% response rate which is excellent. We reported the coverage number response to each question. We reported the average number response to each question by employee group; Inspectors, Senior Inspectors and Chiefs/Management. The average was calculated by adding each individual question response (1 through 5) and then dividing by the number of respondents in each group. The weighted average was calculated by adding each individual questions response (1 through 5) for all respondents, and then dividing the number of respondents. The higher the response, the more favorable it is.

Employee Survey

To gain a better understanding of the issues within the Bureau, an Employee Survey was administered. The survey was delivered to each of the five Bureau locations on or about May 11, 2005. The survey results were tabulated on May 20, 2005 and are displayed below. The survey had 30 questions which could be answered 1. Strongly Disagree; 2. Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4. Agree, and 5. Strongly agree.

Your Job	Inspectors	Senior Inspectors	Chiefs/ Management	Weighted Average
1. My job is challenging	4.28	4.20	4.67	4.29
2. My skills are effectively used in my current position	3.81	3.90	5.00	3.87
3. The job orientation I received was effective	2.94	2.80	3.00	2.93
4. The workload is reasonable	3.44	3.40	2.67	3.41
5. The work environment is safe, comfortable	3.20	3.30	4.00	3.24
6. The work environment is appropriately equipped	2.41	2.30	2.50	2.40
7. I am provided with enough training to do my job properly	2.85	2.60	3.00	2.82
8. I am provided with enough information to do my job properly	3.07	2.80	3.67	3.06
9. I understand what is expected of me in the workplace	3.83	4.00	4.33	3.87
10. High quality work is stressed	3.51	3.30	4.33	3.51
11. There is a high degree of team spirit on my job	3.07	3.10	4.33	3.12
12. My job provides equal opportunities for all employees	3.07	3.00	4.33	3.11

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Your Managers	Inspectors	Senior Inspectors	Chiefs/ Management	Weighted Average
13. Managers give fair and equal treatment to all employees	3.00	2.80	3.67	3.00
14. Managers are available to discuss job related issues	3.61	3.30	4.00	3.59
15. Managers welcome suggestions and feedback	3.15	2.90	4.00	3.15
16. Managers tell employees how they are doing	3.24	2.80	3.67	3.20
17. Managers have trust and confidence in staff	3.11	3.10	3.67	3.13
18. Managers give recognition for improvement and achievement	2.83	2.80	3.67	2.86
19. Managers encourage cooperation in the workplace	3.31	3.00	4.00	3.29
20. Managers provide development opportunities	2.83	2.78	3.67	2.86
21. Managers practice fair and consistent policies and procedures	3.87	2.44	3.67	2.86
22. Staff have trust and confidence in their managers	2.80	2.70	4.00	2.83
23. I am satisfied with my salary	1.47	1.50	1.00	1.46
24. My compensation matches my responsibilities	1.65	1.90	1.33	1.67
25. I am empowered to influence the quality of my work	3.35	3.10	4.00	3.35
26. I am comfortable with the professionalism of my co-workers	3.34	2.80	4.00	3.30
27. I am able to achieve balance between my work and my family life	3.74	3.70	4.00	3.74
28. I enjoy the physical working environment	3.53	3.40	4.33	3.54
29. I am satisfied with the company as a place to work	3.21	3.00	4.33	3.22
30. Overall, how would you rate your job experience?	3.19	2.80	3.67	3.16

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Focus Group Observations

During the course of our employee survey focus groups, many items were brought to the attention of the auditors from various levels within the Bureau. Some of the items appeared to lend additional credence to the findings listed above, while others cannot be substantiated through any other means. We believed it necessary to offer these comments in the report so that the Bureau's command personnel could take appropriate action to correct any situation that might cause the comments to be made or offer information to the Bureau to alter the perspective from which the comments came. The comments are not listed in any particular order, but are grouped for commonality.

Management

- There is no trust in the Bureau's uppermost management
- There needs to be more respect displayed from upper management
- Chiefs and Senior inspectors need more respect from top Bureau and HFD management
- There is a general perception of retaliation if you disagree with upper management
- There is a general perception of poor management within the Bureau

Performance

- Coordinate inspections to eliminate duplication
- Special events need early coordination
- Evaluate all shifts for adequate coverage
- Create meaningful performance measures
- Revise Daily Activity report to make it meaningful and accurate
- Ensure consistent code enforcement

Communication

- Need better upward, downward and lateral communication
- Need to interact and communicate with Emergency Operations

Training

- Mentor new inspectors before allowing them to inspect alone
- Need additional cross training
- Need office and supervisory development training
- Need team building training

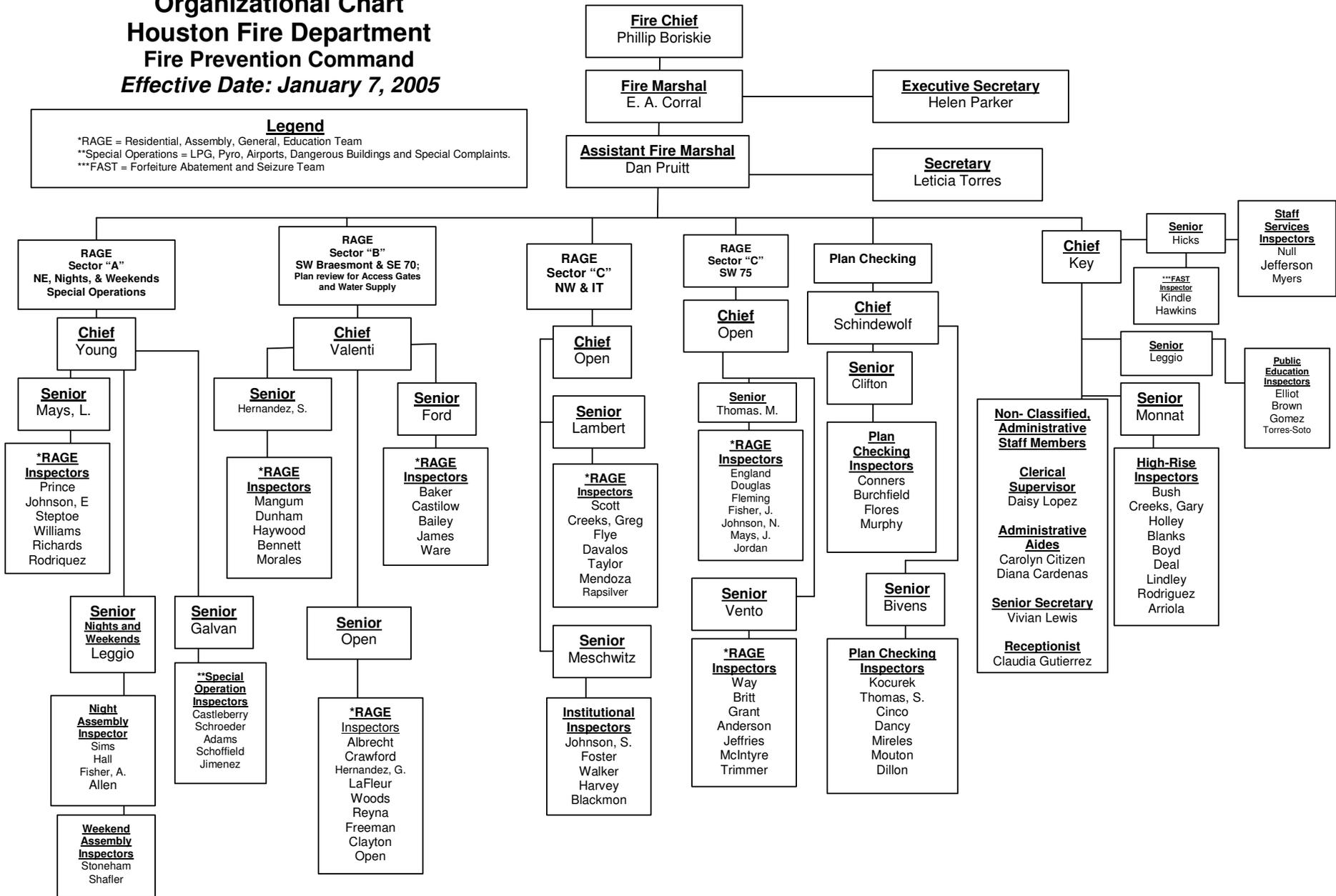
Other

- Need to be able to take vehicles home without returning to the office first
- Review all policies for fairness and functionality

Life Safety Bureau Organizational Chart Houston Fire Department Fire Prevention Command Effective Date: January 7, 2005

Attachment A

Legend
 *RAGE = Residential, Assembly, General, Education Team
 **Special Operations = LPG, Pyro, Airports, Dangerous Buildings and Special Complaints.
 ***FAST = Forfeiture Abatement and Seizure Team



Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

**Houston Fire Department
Overview and Needs Assessment Report
Special Operations, Weekend Team, Fast Team, Night Team, Northeast Rage
Team**

Prepared By: Richard W. Galvan, Acting Chief Inspector

Organization Chart

Chief Inspector

- Melvin Young

Senior Inspector

- Special Operations
 - Richard W. Galvan
- Northeast Rage
 - Leo Mays
- Night Team
 - Joe Leggio

Inspectors

- Special Operations
 - Columbus Adams
 - Robert W. Castleberry
 - Ciro Jimenez
 - Javier Rodriguez
 - Don Schroeder
 - Barry Schoffield
- Weekend Team
 - David Stoneham
 - Karl Shafler
- Fast Team
 - Kenneth Kindle
 - Michael Hawkins
- Northeast Rage
 - Ernest Johnson
 - Larry Prince
 - Dennis Richard
 - Cedric Steptoe
 - Marion Williams
- Night Team
 - Kenneth Sims
 - Andrew Fisher
 - Charles Hall

Performance Measures

Special Operations

- Inspect all major public assemblies (i.e. Reliant Park, George R. Brown, Toyota Center, etc...) annually.
- A minimum of 4 hours of actual inspection time on location each day.
- A minimum of 6 hours of clerical, research, notice generation, phone calls, etc.
- Respond to complaint calls within 30 minutes. (Return calls to OEC within 5 minutes)
- Handle all Special Handling permits within 2 days.
- Return all phone calls within 24 hrs.
- Appear in court for all subpoenas issued and be adequately prepared.
- A notice of violation shall be completed for all inspections.
- All notices of violations shall be completed within 60 days.
- All permits completed within 90 days.
-

Assignments

- Robert W. Castleberry – Minute Maid Park, Miller Outdoor Theatre
 - Fireworks displays, Open burning, Carnivals



- Columbus Adams – Toyota Center, Wortham Theatre, George R. Brown
 - Tents, Candles, Public Assemblies, Joint Referral Committee, Haunted Houses



- Ciro Jimenez – Jones Hall, Arena Theatre, Hobby Center
 - LP – Gas, Tank Removal, Roofing Operations



- Don Schroeder, Javier Rodriguez (Training) – Reliant Stadium, Reliant Astrodome, Reliant Arena, Reliant Center, All Hotel Trade Shows, Expo Center
 - Trades Shows



- Barry Schoffield – Verizon Theater, Alley Theatre
 - Airports (All occupancies within), Dangerous Buildings



Weekend Team

- Respond to complaint calls within 30 minutes (return calls to OEC within 5 minutes).
- Complete all Complaint/Information Records in a timely manner.
- Inspect at least 20 public assemblies for occupant load violations, exit obstructions, and permit compliance.
- All exit obstructions shall be immediately corrected and a citation shall be issued.
- A notice of violation shall be completed for all inspections.
- All notices of violations shall be completed within 60 days.
- All permits completed within 90 days.
- Appear in court for all subpoenas issued and be adequately prepared.

Assignments

- David Stoneham, Karl Shafler
 - All complaint public assemblies
 - Occupant load violations
 - Exit obstructions



- Permit compliance



Night Team

- A minimum of 4 hours of actual inspection time on location each day.
- A minimum of 6 hours of clerical, research, notice generation, phone calls, etc.
- Respond to complaint calls within 30 minutes (return calls to OEC within 5 minutes).
- Handle all Special Handling permits within 2 days.
- Return all phone calls within 24 hrs.
- Appear in court for all subpoenas issued and be adequately prepared.
- A notice of violation shall be completed for all inspections.
- All notices of violations shall be completed within 60 days.
- All permits completed within 90 days.

Assignments

- Kenneth Sims, Andrew Fisher, Charles Hall
 - Public Assemblies, Complaints

Rage Team

- A minimum of 4 hours of actual inspection time on location each day.
- A minimum of 6 hours of clerical, research, notice generation, phone calls, etc.
- Respond to all complaint calls within 30 minutes (return calls to OEC within 5 minutes).
- Handle all Special Handling permits within 2 days.
- Return all phone calls within 24 hrs.
- Appear in court for all subpoenas issued and be adequately prepared.
- A notice of violation shall be completed for all inspections.
- All notices of violations shall be completed within 60 days.
- All permits completed within 90 days.

Assignments

- Ernest Johnson, Larry Prince, Dennis Richard, Cedric Steptoe, Marion Williams
 - Residential, Assemblies, Educational, and General Inspections



Goals

Our goal is to meet or beat our performance measures. Provide a professional service to the citizens and visitors of the City of Houston. Perform our inspections in a professional manner. Perform fire watches or crowd control details in buildings for sporting events or concerts, or in other places of assembly.

Objective

To reduce the loss of life and property damage.

Needs Assessment

Cell phones, updated key maps, video camera for training classes, digital cameras for inspection documentation, lap top computers to perform inspections efficiently.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

**Houston Fire Department
Overview and Needs Assessment Report
High-rise Inspection, High-rise Evacuation Training, Public Education, Staff
Services, 2004 Annual Report
Prepared By: Charles Key, Chief Inspector**

Organization Chart

High Rise Supervisor

- John Monnat
- John Bush
- Freddy Blanks
- Gary Creeks
- Harvey Lindley
- Albert Rodriguez

High Rise Evac Training

- Jatis Holley
- Francisco Arriola Jr.
- Steve Deal

Pub Ed Supervisor

- Joseph Leggio

Pub Ed

- Gaspar Gomez
- Irene Torres-Soto
- Garry Brown
- Larry Elliott

Staff Services Insp

- Ernest Null
- D. Jefferson

Staff Services Clerical Supervisor

- Daisy Lopez

Staff Services

- Carolyn Citizen
- Diana Cardenas

Performance Measures (LSB Public Education)

1. A goal of two programs a day, three hours each for a performance measure of 1500 program per year. Educational programs include, but are not limited to the following:
 - a. Fire extinguisher training
 - b. Mobile Safety Trailer (MST) – smoke simulator used primarily for elementary school students. This program relies heavily upon donated funds to stay in operation.
 - c. Career Day presentations in schools
 - d. City wide Health Fairs
 - e. General Fire Safety – programs are targeted for all age groups, and include both private and corporate groups
 - f. Evacuation Training – for assemblies with an occupancy load over 300



2. Appearances and promotions during National Fire Prevention Week, October of every year.
3. Press conferences for special events:
 - a. Fireworks safety
 - b. Christmas tree safety
 - c. Fire Prevention week
4. General assistance of office support areas.
5. Research and Development
 - a. Creation of code database for Fire Prevention
 - b. Prepare for integration with ILMS system

6. Annual December visit and program for Shriner's Hospital of Galveston – Burn Unit.
7. Maintenance of Fire Prevention Educational Library – these materials are used for teaching the public, as well as distribution at most events, frequently requested by fire stations, civic clubs, and companies. The materials are purchased through the annual budget process.
 - a. Educational videos to loan
 - b. Hand-out materials and brochures
 - c. Children's literature
 - d. Safety message giveaways
8. Hydrant inspections generated by suppression complaints.
9. Fire safety information booths in public retail areas.
10. Cooperation with Medi-Life coordinator Captain David Almaguer.
Captain Almaguer manages donated funds that support the MST
11. Subject to call-in for programs and projects after hours.

High-rise Benchmarks

Our current section inspection benchmark is based first upon a priority system wherein the highest priority goes to the tallest occupancies where people sleep and that do not have automatic fire protection sprinkler systems, to the lowest priority occupancies where people sleep and that are full protected by automatic fire protection sprinkler systems; to the tallest general occupancy buildings without automatic fire protection sprinkler systems, and lastly to the lowest general occupancy buildings with full automatic fire protection sprinkler systems. Secondly, the benchmark is based upon square footage inspection activities.

The benchmark is an overall goal of completion of 30 high-rise building inspections per year per inspector, this would extrapolate into an average of 8-10 floors per building per average 8-hour inspection, with 15,000 square foot per average floor or approximately 120,000-150,000 square feet per day.

With five high-rise inspection personnel the above should translate into a target of 24-36 month inspection turnaround for all residential high-rises and a 36-48 month turnaround for all other high-rise buildings and structures inspected by this section. This number would include follow-up and re-inspections and permit inspections where more than a site inspection must be undertaken for approvals.

While due diligence has been given to providing a reasonably attainable goal based upon timely and accurate data, it must be remembered that high-rise inspections are with few exceptions very time intensive due in great part to factors or events beyond the inspectors' control. Such factors include, but are not limited to: unique design of building or structure; meetings and consultations with property management /owners, Building Code officials, service company representatives, engineers and architects; reports and letter correspondences; scheduling and scheduling conflicts with property representatives; dependency upon an appointment arrangement with frequent unexpected cancellations or delays; and the frequent necessity to attend to special details or duty as may frequently arise from unforeseen events or VIP visitations involving high-rise occupancies all of which frustrate efforts to prove "productivity".

The unique fire and life-safety hazards and problems that frequently mandate extensive code research into both the City Fire and Construction Codes. As such, a great amount of preparation and follow-up work goes into a properly conducted and completed inspection, and quality inspections are always our paramount objective.

Bureau Function (Staff Services)

Staff Services provides support for the daily field inspection operations of the Life Safety Bureau while also managing its administrative needs. Additionally, citizens and business persons receive information and answers to their questions regarding fire and life safety issues with telephone assistance. Behind the scenes functions, such as the budget, purchasing, file management, data entry, payroll and liaison to other departments are part of the Staff Services.

Other Functions of Staff Services include:

- ILMS Liaison to the Building Dept., IT Group
 - Resolve problems that might come up with the ILMS for this Bureau, by obtaining information about said problem and forward that information on to Building Dept., IT Group.
- Permit Database administrator for Inspection Bureau
- Vehicle Database administrator for Inspection Bureau
 - Assign and reassign vehicles in Inspection Bureau and maintain a database of all said assignments.
- Court Liaison for Inspection Bureau
 - Drop off citation and pick-up subpoenas to and from the court system.
- Technical Support for Inspectors in Fire Prevention.
 - Help inspectors resolve basic to advance problems on the computer, ILMS, Activity reports, Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access and more.
- Public Information Officer for Fire Prevention
 - Answer calls from the public related to fire prevention – inspections Bureau.
- Software tester. Software coming soon to this Bureau (Virtual Reality Inspections).
- Citizens Assistance
- Fire Prevention Command Budget
- Inventory Control
- Training Coordinator
- Research and Development
- F.A.S.T. Team
- Clerical and Data Entry Staff
- Budget Control and Purchasing
- Municipal Courts Liaison
- Administrative Support
- Inspection Team Support
- Self-Assessment Accreditation
- Insurance Services Organizations Reports
- Fire Prevention Command Guidelines
- Office Supplies and Equipment
- Work to accomplish any other related duties that my supervisor might assign.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Houston Fire Department

Overview and Needs Assessment Report

**South East Rage Team, Braesmont Rage Team - Residential Inspections,
Assemblies Inspections, General Inspections, Educational Inspections**

Prepared By: John M. Valenti, Chief Inspector

Organization Chart

Chief Inspector

- John Valenti

Senior Inspector

- Marcus Hicks
- Jerry Ford
- Salvadore Hernandez

Inspectors

- Royce Baily
- Cedric Baker
- Kenneth Baker
- Dan Castilow
- Don Mangum
- Willie Haywood
- Gilbert Allen
- Alvin James
- Tim Bennet
- Gary Albrecht
- Reggie Woods
- Mark Reyna
- Houston LaFleur
- Elbert Clayton
- Burt Crawford
- Burt Freeman
- Johnny Morales
- George Hernandez

Performance Report

- Total of 9 inspectors with an average time of 9.71
 - Royce Bailey – 9.67 Average hours worked
 - Timothy Bennett – 9.28 Average hours worked
 - Larry Britt – 13.33 Average hours worked
 - John Dunham – 9.78 Average hours worked
 - Willie Haywood – 9.49 Average hours worked
 - Kenneth Kindel – 7.12 Average hours worked
 - Donald Mangum – 9.14 Average hours worked
 - Joe W. Mays – 9.99 Average hours worked
 - Mark Reyna – 9.59 Average hours worked

Bureau Function

The Rage Team is responsible for inspections in Residential, Assemblies, General and Educational occupancies. Southeast Rage is responsible for plan review of all gates and access in the City of Houston for residential occupancies. Southeast Rage is responsible for all Standby Fire Watch assignments.



Goals

Our goal is to meet monthly performance measures. Performance measures for residential properties are four per month. All permits serviced within 90 days. All educational occupancies completed in October.

Objective

The objectives of the Southeast and Braesmont Rage Teams are to reduce the loss of life and property damage in assigned area. This is achieved by providing a through Life Safety Inspection for these occupancies.

Needs Assessment

Clerical support is needed to answer telephones, schedule appointments, do filing, and support inspectors. Every inspector needs to have a phone assigned. Flashlights and updated key maps need to be made available. Cameras should be issued to every inspector to document code violations.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Houston Fire Department

Overview and Needs Assessment Report

Institutions Team - Assisted Living Facilities, Nursing Homes, Hospitals and Jails

Prepared By: Billy Lambert, Acting Chief Inspector; E.L. Meschwitz, Senior Inspector; G.N. Creeks, Acting Senior Inspector

Organization Chart

Acting Chief Inspector

- Billy Lambert
- Leo Mays

Senior Inspector

- Eddie Meschwitz

Inspectors

- Ronald Blackmon
- Anthony Foster
- Sam Foster
- Marty Harvey
- Kenneth Walker

Performance Measures

- Performance standards are set at 4 hours of specific activity per day
- Institutions Team average hours of specific activity is 4.22
- Assisted Living Facilities: (Avg Size) 2,000 Sq Ft. Average number of inspections per day is 3 homes. Follow-ups must be made in some cases.
- Nursing Homes: General inspection of an average (20,000 Sq Ft) Nursing Home would take approximately 4 to 5 hours. Required to be inspected semi-annually.



- Hospitals and Jails: 2 to 3 inspections of average size (20,000 Sq Ft) per week. Large multistory could take 2 to 3 weeks to finish a general inspection. Required to be inspected semi-annually.



Bureau Function

The Institutions Team is responsible for inspections in assisted living facilities, nursing homes, hospitals, and jails. They also handle all complaints on these types of facilities. This team is responsible for responding to special handling permits within four days.

Goals

The goal of the Institutions Team is to help provide a safe working and living environment through education engineering and code enforcement.

Objective

The aim of the Institution Team is to reduce the loss of life and property damage. This is achieved by providing through life safety inspections and continuing education for these occupancies.

Needs Assessment

- Cell phone (For communication)
- Automobiles (Assigned to each Inspector)
- Updated key map for each Inspector
- Computers for each inspector
- Cameras available
- Field training for all new Inspectors in the Bureau

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

**Houston Fire Department
Overview and Needs Assessment Report
Fire Prevention Rage Team
Prepared By: Michael Thomas, Acting Chief Inspector**

Organization Chart

Acting Chief Inspector

- Michael Thomas

Senior Inspector

- Charles Vento

Inspectors

- Roger Anderson
- Larry Britt
- Terry Douglas
- Mark England
- Jack Fisher
- O.J. Grant
- Waddell Jeffries
- Nate Johnson
- Kenneth Jordan
- Joe Mays
- Vermice McIntyre
- Douglas Trimmer
- Jerry Way

Performance Measures

- A monthly average of approximately 141 general inspections with notices.
- A monthly average of approximately 292 general follow-ups to inspections.
- A monthly average of approximately 26 complaints that are investigated.
- A monthly average of approximately 205 permit inspections with follow-ups as needed.
- There are approximately 97 public and private schools that are inspected in this area in the month of October.

Not included in these figures are the many hours of training, clerical, code research and meetings that take place throughout the month.

Bureau Function

The Rage Inspection Teams of the Houston Fire Department's Fire Prevention Office were developed to address the following inspection needs: Apartments, Schools, Low Rise Hotel and Motels, Daycare Facilities, Foster Homes, Malls, Small Businesses, Public Assemblies, Warehouses "Storage Height Less Than 12 FT", Vehicle Fueling Stations.



Goals

The primary goal of the Southwest "Rage" Inspection Team is to inspect all occupancies within the corporate limits of the City of Houston, and within a reasonable time frame, that are not covered under the responsibility of a specialized inspection team. This would include residential (Apartments, Low Rise Hotels/Motels, Foster Homes), Educational (Schools, Daycares), Assembly (Restaurants, Party Halls), and General

Commercial Business Occupancies (Malls, Warehouses, Vehicle Service Stations, Low Rise Office Buildings, Etc.)

Objective

The basic objectives of the “Rage” Inspection Team are as follows:

- Conduct quality fire inspections and abate all known violations.
- Provide to our citizens fire prevention and general safety information.
- Handle all fire prevention permits in a competent manner.
- Respond with timeliness to all citizen and firefighter complaints.

Needs Assessment

- Automobiles – A sensible procurement and distribution program that would replace the fleet in a reasonable time frame. Currently the fleet is allowed to age and deteriorate beyond what it should before replacement.
- Clerical support.
- Increase the availability of computer technical support.
- Electronic equipment – digital cameras, telephones/two way voice communication.
- Office equipment – A procurement and replacement program for computer hardware/software, copiers, printers, and fax machines as needed.

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

Houston Fire Department

Overview and Needs Assessment Report

North West Rage Team - Residential Occupancies, Assembly Occupancies, General Occupancies, Educational Occupancies, Complaints

Prepared By: B.W. Lambert, Acting Chief Inspector; G.N. Creeks, Acting Senior Inspector

Organization Chart

Acting Chief Inspector

- Billy Lambert
- Leo Mays

Acting Senior Inspector

- Gregory Creeks
- Bobby Davalos

Inspectors

- Randolph Scott
- Arcadio Mendoza
- Reginald Flye
- Gladstone Taylor
- Gary Rapsilver

Performance Measures

Occupancy Type	Frequency of Inspection	# in City
1. Residential	2.5 to 3 Years	5,000
2. Assembly	Every 2 Years	5,000
3. General	Every 6 to 7 Years	80,276
4. Educational	Annually	900
5. Day Cares	Annually	600
6. Malls	Annually	63
7. Complaints	As Submitted	288

Northwest Rage Team performance standards are set at 4 hours of specific activity daily. This team averages 5.33 daily.

Bureau Function

The NW Rage Team is responsible for inspections in residential, assemblies, general, educational, day cares and malls. We are also responsible for responding to all complaints and special handling filed through the fire prevention office.

Goals

Our first goal is to treat the citizens of Houston with fairness, respect, and courtesy while providing education in fire prevention. Our second goal is to generate respect and compliance of inspections and permit requirements while meeting our performance measures.

Objective

The aim of the Northwest Rage Team is to reduce the loss of life and property damage. This is achieved by providing thorough life safety inspections and continuing education for these occupancies.

Needs Assessment

- Cell phone (For communication)
- Automobiles (Assigned to each Inspector)
- Updated key map for each Inspector
- Computer for each Inspector
- Measuring devices and cameras available
- Field training officers for all new Inspectors in the Bureau

Fire Department Life Safety Bureau Performance Audit

**Houston Fire Department
Overview and Needs Assessment Report
Plan Checking Bureau - Fire Protection & Fire Alarm System, Flammable &
Combustible Liquid Installation
Prepared By: P.C. Schindewolf, Chief Fire Inspector; Rob Clifton, Senior
Inspector**

Organization Chart

Chief Inspector

- Perry Schindewolf

Senior Inspector

- William Bivens
- Rob Clifton

Inspectors

- Eddie Burchfield
- Tony Flores
- Robert Conners
- Larry Cinco
- Kevin Dancy
- Martin Kocurek
- Raleigh Murphy
- Steve Thomas
- Oscar Mireless
- Stanley Mouton
- Craig Dillon

Performance Measures

- Checked 6686 sets of plans
- 1989 fire alarm inspections
- 3553 fire protection system inspections
- 146 flammable/combustible liquid installation inspections
- 1509 overtime inspections
- Mayor's permit task force
- General Appeals board meetings
- Monthly building & fire coordination meetings

- Major Field Inspection Projects
 - Bush Airport, F.I.S. Building, Terminal E & Hobby Airport renovations
 - St. James Condo – Fire Alarm
 - Exxon Training Center
 - Texas State Hotel
 - Federal Reserve Building
 - 4-Leaf Tower Remodeling
 - Metro- Lee P. Brown Building
 - Harris County Civil Courts Building
 - Dominion Post Oak Condos

- Major Plan Reviews
 - Lakewood Church Conversion
 - 6 Asbury Place
 - Memorial Herman Medical Plaza
 - 5201 Memorials Apts
 - Allen Parkway Apts
 - Erickson Retirement Community
 - Airport Projects
 - Citco Corporation
 - Sysco Office Campus

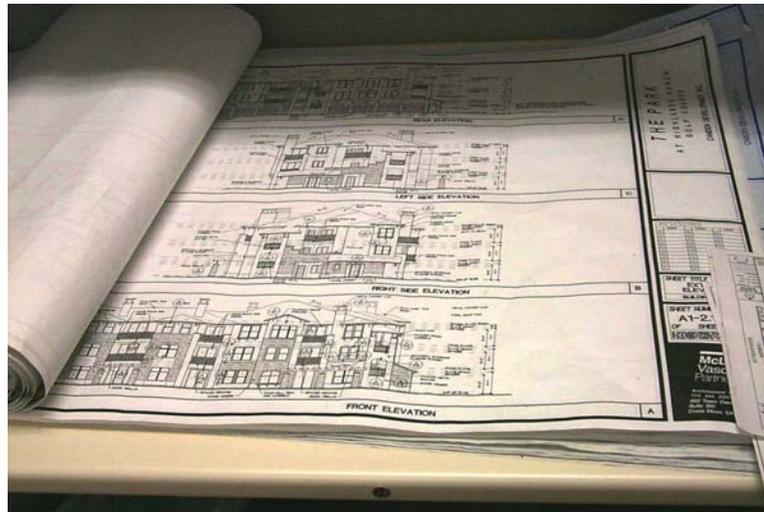


Bureau Function

The Plan Checking Bureau of the Houston Fire Department was created in the year 1967 to assist the building department in the plan review and field inspection of standpipe and automatic sprinkler systems. Through the years, responsibilities of inspection work, plan checking of fire alarm systems and flammable/combustible liquid tank installations has been added to the areas of responsibility.

Goals

Our goal is to check building permit plans pertaining to fire alarm and standpipe systems for compliance with the City of Houston fire and building codes. Our number one priority is to provide quality work along with timely plan checks. Additionally, our other main goal is to provide timely field inspections of standpipes, automatic sprinklers, special extinguishing systems, fire alarm systems and flammable/combustible liquid tank installations.



Objective

The objective of the plan checking section is to provide a safe effective suppression system and a well functioning evacuation & detection system in buildings constructed in the City of Houston. These systems will provide improved safety conditions for building occupants and fire fighters.

Needs Assessment

Clerical support is needed to answer the telephone, schedule appointments, do filing, typing and copying in order to allow the plan checkers to concentrate on checking plans.

Office equipment, specifically chairs, will be needed in the next budget year.

**Houston Fire Department
Overview & Needs Assessment Report
Hazardous Material Inspection Team / Homeland Security
Prepared by: Chief Inspector George Meadows**

Organization Chart

Chief Inspector

- George Meadows

Senior Inspector

- Mark Ritchie

Inspectors

- Herbert Henderson
- Alfred Resendez
- Brian Mangham
- Livingston Hampton
- Narcisco "Mitch" Gonzales
- Chad Miller
- Mike Alms

HMIT Mission Statement

- To improve the quality of life for all Houston citizens and responding firefighters by aggressively enforcing all hazardous material and High-piled Storage laws and ordinances, as well as, participating in hazard assessment planning of Homeland Security targets.

Responsibilities

- Conducting inspections of new and existing Hazardous Material and High-piled storage facilities.
- Plan review of new & existing Hazardous Material and High-Piled storage facilities.
- Review technical reports prepared by Fire Protection Engineers.
- Validation of Hazardous Material Inventory Statements, Hazardous Material Management Plans and High-piled storage plans.
- Review of sprinkler design and density
- Performs Homeland Security Target Hazard Inspections. Conducts environmental inspections with HPD Major Offenders Unit.

Performance Measures

- 95% of all plans submitted to HMIT will be reviewed and disposition recorded within 5 working days.
- 80% of all HMIT permitted locations will be inspected within 90 days of receiving permit.
- 90% of all high-piled storage locations are code compliant within 12 months of initial inspection. Completion time is dependent on complexity of required building modification. Immediate steps are taken to minimize hazards and ensure a safe operation while achieving total compliance.
- 70% of all inspected hazardous material locations are code compliant within 18 months of initial inspections. Completion time is dependent on complexity of required building modification. Immediate steps are taken to minimize hazards and ensure a safe operation while achieving total compliance.
- 100% of complaints received will be responded to within 3 working days.

HMIT Function and History

In June of 1995 the City of Houston experienced a catastrophic warehouse fire involving hazardous material commodities. This fire occurred at the Houston Distribution Industries facility located in the 8500 block of Market Street. The Market Street fire had a devastating effect on the surrounding community of Pleasantville and caused many citizens to become concerned with hazardous material operations throughout the City of Houston. This fire also compelled the Houston Fire Department to critique and change inspection practices and philosophy. Historically, the Fire Prevention Bureau focused solely on revenue-generated inspections. This past policy, coupled with the fact the Fire Prevention Bureau lacked specialized inspections, allowed serious fire code violations to be overlooked. As a result, the Houston Fire Department initiated a team inspection concept that would promote life-safety through specialized inspections and rigorous code enforcement. A Mayoral Executive Order mandated the Hazardous Material Inspection Team and consequently it was the first specialized team formed. Hazardous Material and High-piled storage inspections are primarily driven by permit applications and citizen complaints. These facilities often require large expenditures and complex building modifications in order to be code compliant. Many of these occupancies require transitional steps to achieve maximum preservation of life and property and to assist the building owner with compliance issues. Recently, Homeland Security was added to our lists of responsibilities. HMIT Inspectors are jointly conducting target hazard assessment inspections with other local Homeland Security agencies.

Goal

- Our goal is to conduct competent inspections and plan reviews of hazardous material and High-piled Storage locations while meeting our stated performance measures.

Objectives

- The objective of the HMIT, simply stated, is to protect life and property from fire or incidents involving hazardous materials in a timely and professional manner, therefore improving the quality of life for the citizens of Houston and responding firefighters.

Needs Assessment

- **Base Line Physical & Blood Test**
- **Digital Camera**
- **Assignment Pay & FTO Pay**
- **Professional Training**
- **Annual IFC Code Development Meeting & Training Seminar**
- **Fire Inspector Certification I & Fire Inspector Certification II For Haz-Mat Inspectors**
- **Plan Examination Certification for Hazardous Material Inspectors**
- **NFPA membership & subscription service and other publications (ASTM, FM, and UL) adopted by code.**
- **Fire Protection Engineer**
- **Mobile Communication**

Permit Compliance Group (PCG)

The PCG consists of 6 temporary non-classified employees and are under the immediate supervision of a Chief Inspector George Meadows. PCG members are charged with performing the following functions:

- Performing permit inquiries in commercial occupancies. These inquiries include determining if a permit is required or current.
- Delivering permit applications in commercial occupancies when required.

The above-mentioned functions allow for better utilization of Inspectors. Inspectors are now able to concentrate their efforts on conducting life-safety inspections and not searching for permit revenue. The efforts of the PCG have allowed the Fire Department to surpass the permit budgeted revenue by 65%. It is also important to note that this group was only in existence for 5 months of the budget year. Future plans include employing PCG members on a permanent basis.

EXHIBIT 1

VIEWS OF RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS



CITY OF HOUSTON
Fire Department

Interoffice

Correspondence

To: Annise D. Parker
City Controller

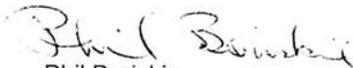
From: Phil Boriskie
Fire Chief

Date: September 19, 2005

Subject: Response to Mir-Fox &
Rodriguez Audit Report

Attached is the Houston Fire Department's response to the Mir-Fox & Rodriguez Audit Report.

Please contact me at 713-247-8217 if you require further information.


Phil Boriskie
Fire Chief

cc: Michael Ivy, Acting Fire Marshal, Life Safety Bureau



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MFRPC was engaged to perform a performance audit of the Bureau by the City Controller in an engagement letter dated February 16, 2005 pursuant to Contract No. 56546, approved by City Council Ordinance No. 04-1296.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this performance audit was to perform an independent assessment of the Bureau by examining operational areas within the Bureau. The engagement began February 18, 2005 and the fieldwork was concluded June 29, 2005. The primary objectives included the following:

- Examine and assess operational practices, resources, technology tools, and training practices to provide recommendations for improving the coordination, efficiency, and effectiveness of Bureau functions;
- Assess the organization's structure and management practices to help ensure all available resources are being utilized as effectively as possible;
- Provide practical recommendations for improving the quality of the processes and the overall cost efficiency and employment of resources related to Bureau operations;
- Determine the overall adequacy of the Bureau's systems of internal control as related to the Bureau processes.

ASSESSMENT

This performance audit is the third operational review of the Bureau within the last ten years. Each of the previous reviews (Abbey Study in 1996 and Tri Data Study in 1999) identified significant accomplishments and weaknesses in the operation of HFD and the Bureau. Additionally, the Maximus Fee Study in 2001 reviewed the City's Permit Fee structure and recommended a change in the manner to which permit fee amounts were set. The permit fee process was never changed. MFRPC has observed similar issues addressed in the previous studies and have also identified new issues. The significant issues, observations, and recommendations identified are as follows:

1. Issue: Ineffective operational management

Observation: The daily operation of the Bureau is the responsibility of the Assistant Fire Marshal. The management style of the current Assistant Fire Marshal has permitted overtime abuses to occur and created an atmosphere of mistrust and fear of retribution that has permeated throughout the Bureau. Many Chief Inspectors and Senior Inspectors spend the majority of their day behind closed doors of their offices.

Recommendation: The Fire Chief in conjunction with the Fire Marshal should take steps to eliminate or correct the prevailing management style to foster an open door policy throughout the Bureau and get the supervisors out of the office and into the field and afford them the ability to communicate with the Inspectors.

Response: We agree with this finding and recommendation. The Assistant Fire Marshal has been temporarily reassigned. The length of this reassignment is contingent on the outcome of pending investigations and future appeals.

Current Fire Prevention Management has begun the process of fostering an open door policy. Examples of this include meeting with all sections and soliciting input from each discipline and rank. Responsive action includes establishing and meeting with focus groups to jointly resolve Life Safety Bureau (LSB) issues. An Inspector Advisory Committee was created in March 2005 and has yielded positive results; including writing fair and equitable policies on LSB overtime assignments and transfers. Several group meetings soliciting input on LSB's five (5) year plan have been conducted as of September 8, 2005. Future meetings involving various LSB disciplines will occur at two- (2) week intervals.

Communication within the Bureau will be enhanced with the publication of a monthly LSB newsletter and reinstating Fire Marshal Directives.

Supervisors spend most of their days in the office, as they review numerous documentation requirements. The fruition of the ILMS will allow Supervisors to spend more time in the field by incorporating all of the inspection and permit function into a single database. Phase I of the ILMS is complete. Phase II is estimated to be complete in March of 2006.

2. Issue: Inadequate professional and job related training.

Observation: The Bureau is expected to be operated similar to a business, yet there is no management training and little job related training provided. Inspectors find themselves promoted to Senior Inspectors and beyond, yet are not provided with the necessary management training to accomplish that for which they are held accountable. Funding for travel for professional training including conferences is not authorized.

Recommendation: A review of the Bureau's training requirements be made to establish levels of inspector proficiency while incorporating basic management and people skills training. These should be tied to promotion standards. A Bureau Training Plan should then be developed to ensure all Inspectors meet the minimum requirements for their positions. Consideration should be given for individuals to be voluntary participants in training in preparation for the next position prior to testing for that position.

Funding should be provided annually to permit one Chief Inspector and at least two Senior Inspectors the opportunity to attend fire prevention professional

conferences. Consideration should also be made to support the expenses for the Bureau to provide a representative to the International Code Council (ICC).

Response: We agree with your observation and somewhat agree with your stated recommendations. Fire Prevention recognizes the need to improve training and acknowledges funding has not been provided for this initiative. Fire Prevention Management is in the process of developing a comprehensive training program that will include the following:

Knowledge Evaluation Survey - This will be required for all levels of inspection personnel. The purpose of this survey is two fold. First to determine the subject areas where the group's knowledge is weak. The second purpose is to prioritize the training areas identified so that the areas where many individuals are weak and/or the areas with high importance are targeted first.

Training Program - Curriculum will be both general and specific. The program will include formal training on code interpretation and application from national code experts, as well as, local officials. A formal training seminar from an outside agency was conducted on August 31, 2005. The Training Program will include Officer Development, Diversity Training, Communication Skills (verbal and written) and Legal Aspects of Code Enforcement for all members. At the conclusion of each training session, all Inspection personnel will be required to demonstrate an appropriate knowledge level in the topic presented by testing on the subject matter. Currently, eight (8) training classes have been prepared and are planned to be conducted every other month.

The LSB will budget funding for participation in the ICC code development process. Without adequate funding this action will not be realized. Estimated cost is \$6,000.00. Currently, funding for this action has not been provided.

The LSB is unable to influence promotion standards as these are mandated and governed by Chapter 143 of the State Municipal Code and employee contracts.

3. Issue: Inadequate computer data system.

Observation: Inspectors have not been provided the means to record building/occupancy inspections while still in the field. They must return to their offices to input inspection results into a Microsoft Access Database (homemade computer) database. In addition, this homemade computer database was developed within the Bureau by a Chief Inspector that happened to have certain knowledge of computer databases. The Bureau plans to replace the homemade database with the City's Planning and Development Department's Integrated Land Management System (ILMS), which already has 1,200 users and is 14 years old. The ILMS is being modified to accommodate certain needs of the Bureau. Over the past several years the Bureau has approached their computer

system needs on a piecemeal basis, and it is our understanding that the ILMS will not meet many of the management related needs of the Bureau.

Recommendations: Evaluate the functionality of the ILMS for appropriateness; costs related to implementation, peripheral equipment and training; the ability to interface with the inspector in the field utilizing standardized inspection checklists; and its ability to provide timely and meaningful management reports to HFD and Bureau management. Phase I of ILMS is not fully deployed and the benefits have not been adequately realized within the Bureau. Phase II should be reviewed in depth, as it incorporates the use of outdated equipment for field operations.

If the evaluation of the ILMS is satisfactory, then the City should ensure that the implementation is adequately funded.

If the evaluation indicated ILMS is not a good economic and/or operational fit for the Bureau, then an appropriate building/occupancy inspection scheduling and tracking system needs to be identified, funded, procured and implemented so the Bureau can operate and be managed in the most cost effective manner.

Response: We agree that it is more efficient to provide Inspectors with the means to record building/occupancy inspections while still in the field. When fully implemented, the ILMS program will provide this function and Inspectors will no longer input data into the Microsoft Access Database (homemade computer) database. The ILMS being fourteen years old indicates that the system provides for stability as it contains all business addresses in the City of Houston. The amount of users of this system is the responsibility of the Public Works & Engineering Department. Currently, there are City contracts to upgrade ILMS to an Oracle Database and a Unix Operating System. This is being accomplished without compromising daily activities. The Fire Marshal's Office is requesting an IT person to avoid IT problems that are identified in the audit and meet all of the management related needs of the Bureau as it relates to information management technology.

We are utilizing the relationship with the City of Houston's IT Department and Public Works & Engineering Department to assist us in the evaluation of our system needs, as it relates to the use of ILMS for appropriateness until an IT person can be hired to continue with this project. Phase I of ILMS is fully deployed and the benefits have been realized as illustrated in the MFR commendation of the Permit Compliance Group which benefited from the ILMS being implemented which increased revenue by \$1.4 million in the first six months of operation. Phase II will be reviewed in depth, as it incorporates the use of outdated equipment for field operations and tests are currently scheduled to use wireless air cards to test the equipment, system, and training.

The information contained in the Building Department's ILMS is essential to the Fire Marshal's operations. Any other system would not contain data related to building code functions and conditions. We agree to fully realize the benefit of the ILMS project (Phase I and II) needs a fully funded implementation and operational plan developed to maximize its returns on investment. The costs to fully implement Phase II of the ILMS are as follows:

IT Programmer Analyst III	\$ 45,630.00
Web Focus Consulting/Developing	\$ 63,000.00
Web Focus Development Studio Quick Start	\$ 6,500.00
Web Focus Software maintenance per year	\$ 863.00
122 - Compaq TC1100 Tablet PCs (Cost of each unit \$1,849.00.)	\$225,578.00
122 - DeskJet 450ci Mobile Printers for use with the TC1100 Tablet PCs. \$165. each	\$ 20,130.00
122 - Whistler Power Inverters, power supply for the hp DeskJet 450ci Mobile Printers. \$39.65 each	<u>\$ 4,837.30</u>
 Total ILMS Phase II implementation personnel/training/hardware/software	 <u>\$366,538.30</u>

4. Issue: Critical lack of a complete management reporting system.

Observation: Current reporting is predominantly manual and the Bureau does not have an integrated information system to facilitate management reporting.

Recommendation: Implement a computerized management reporting system to provide HFD and Bureau management with complete and meaningful daily, weekly, and monthly reports, which will enable them to manage the Bureau.

Response: We agree that a complete management reporting system is critical to the Fire Marshal's Office. The Microsoft Access database titled Inspectors Daily Report provides activities of each inspector for daily, weekly and monthly reports that are currently reviewed by team supervisors. These reports will be made available by utilizing Web Focus upon the completion of Phase II of ILMS. Currently, Phase I of the ILMS provides for all permit inspection scheduling, permit renewal, and pending re-inspections. Phase II will provide for citations issued, citation status and many other functions that could be utilized in various reports and historical data for review prior to inspection. Web Focus is a report-writing program that interfaces with the ILMS. See cost in item 3.

5. Issue: Incomplete building/occupancy inspection database.

Observation: The Bureau has inadequate information to determine if the Bureau's occupancy inspection goals related to high-rise buildings and hazardous materials have been met. The listing of high-rise buildings and hazardous materials occupancies in the homemade database is incomplete. In

addition, certain buildings/occupancies subject to inspection that were listed in the Bureau's old databases were never transformed to the homemade database. As a result there is a risk that certain high-rises and hazardous materials in the City are not being subjected to the Bureau's inspections.

Recommendation: To develop a complete listing of high-rise building and hazardous material locations that are subject to the Bureau's periodic inspections, the contents of the old computer systems need to be compared to the contents of the homemade computer system.

Response: The ILMS has grown into a complete building/occupancy inspection database through 14 years of use, enabling it to capture all business in the City of Houston as each location has been entered into the system by the Building Department, Signs Bureau, Solid Waste or other City departments using the system. We agree that the Bureau's work output cannot be measured, as there is inadequate information in the current in-house database and not all the ILMS data fields are built or populated. However, this will be resolved as Inspectors populate multiple fields in the ILMS. The Fire Marshal's Office did not have an IT person nor a data migration plan in place when the Bull System was discontinued as the Bull System could not be made Y2K compliant. This was also the case throughout the period of time when the Armour System was used to facilitate permit sales. The in-house Microsoft Access database was created to provide a replacement for the daily report paper form. This was not intended to provide for all building occupancies identified in the Bull System. Each Inspector was able to input address data that they desired. The in-house database was not set up to be the definitive integrated system that provided all necessary addresses in the City. The buildings (referenced on page 20 of the audit draft) such as schools, high-rise buildings, etc. are contained in separate databases utilized as reference and are not housed in any other data systems. The Microsoft Access database was only designed to improve data collection from a paper form and to provide reporting capability. This system was never designed with the intention of migration of data from the Microsoft Access Database to the intended ILMS system. None of the systems used by the Fire Marshal's Office and Permit Office had at anytime the benefit of an Information Technician dedicated to oversee the process. Funding the request for the Programmer/Analyst III position will provide for the report needs, maintenance, training, consulting, and planning for future data system needs. Failure to provide funding for the LSB IT position will limit the ILMS effectiveness to being dependant on what is currently provided and the improvements from ILMS Phase II implementation.

The recommendation to incorporate information from the in-house Microsoft Access database to the ILMS would be very labor intensive, costly, and provide very little value. The Microsoft Access Database is primarily useful in providing historical information as archive data until the ILMS replaces its function. The complete implementation of Phase II of ILMS, as well as, funding updated Tablet PC's will provide the best automated solution to LSB's data requirements. As of

this writing, funding for the Tablet PC's has not been provided. Absent the appropriation of funds for the ILMS (Tablet PC's) hardware, the full value of the ILMS will not be realized. Estimated cost for purchasing the necessary ILMS Phase II hardware is approximately \$250,000.00. See cost in item 3.

6. Issue: Lack of a comprehensive quality control program

Observation: The Bureau does not have a quality control program to ensure that the quality of the building/occupancy inspections is consistent. In addition, the quality of the information in the homemade database is not adequate because the data that is imported into the database is not verified.

Recommendations: The Bureau should develop a quality control program to ensure the quality and consistency of building/occupancy inspections, and subsequent recording of inspection information.

The Bureau should develop a process to review and, if necessary, correct the information contained in the current database to verify the accuracy and completeness of the building/occupancy inspection related data.

Response: LSB management is in the process of developing a quality assurance program that includes revised Performance Measures, Report Review, Peer Review, and Customer Satisfaction Surveys. We anticipate these programs to be fully implemented once Phase II of the ILMS is complete. Projected completion is estimated to be March of 2006. Estimated cost to implement this program is \$10,000.00. Funding for this action has not been provided. Without adequate funding, the effectiveness of this program will be severely reduced.

Performance Measures - These revised measures will identify Fire Prevention's effectiveness and impact on fire/life safety and education needs of the public.

Review of Reports - This will assure the quality of the final inspection report; identify both internal and external trends; and provide the inspector with feedback of ways to improve his work efforts. Report review will also ensure that inspections are valid, being performed in a uniform manner and violations are corrected in a timely fashion. Report review will also ensure that all relevant building history and inspection corrective action taken is addressed and recorded.

Random Peer Review - This review is designed to allow peers to critique other member's reports, in a non-threatening manner, to ensure appropriate documentation is obtained and identify training needs.

External Customer Satisfaction Surveys - This will provide a method of validating the competency of the Inspector and verify that the targeted occupancy was inspected.

7. Issue: Lack of standardization in building/occupancy inspections.

Observation: Many Inspectors, with the same inspection requirements, do not use a standardized inspection checklist. Inconsistent inspections are occurring and, as a result, the Bureau is providing less than adequate service to Houston's citizens.

Recommendation: Bureau Teams, as part of the Quality Control Program, should develop a standard building/occupancy checklist for each building/occupancy type, and ensure that the revised checklists are used for the applicable building/occupancy being inspected. The checklist should also include the inspector's name, date of inspection, arrival time, departure time, building/occupancy contacts, name, telephone numbers and locations, inspector comments and supervisor comments. The inspection reports should cite specific code violation references, and be reviewed by the inspector's immediate supervisor.

Response: Fire Prevention management is in the process of developing standardized checklists applicable for different occupancy types. This information will be captured in the ILMS per each inspection and will facilitate supervisory review. However, caution should be given to relying solely on the checklist to ensure all violations are adequately addressed. Fire Prevention Management will also develop and identify required fields to be completed on the Notice of Violation. This will be part of Fire Prevention's Quality Assurance program, as well as, standardizing inspections. Standardized checklists are targeted to be in use by December 2005.

8. Issue: Lack of communication and specialty equipment.

Observation: Many Inspectors do not have basic equipment, such as cell phones, pagers, messaging equipment etc., to perform their jobs and/or communicate with their supervisors. In the case of Special Events coverage, radios are not available to facilitate the on-duty Inspector's constant direct communication with emergency services. In addition, a City policy restricts multiple means of communication being issued to Inspectors.

Recommendations: The communication requirements of all Inspectors should be evaluated to determine whether they require radios, cell phones, pagers, two-way pagers or some other communication device(s). Once determined, sufficient communication devices should be obtained and issued to permit both emergency and routine communications. Certain Inspectors may require more than one communication device.

As part of a needs analysis a survey should be conducted of all members of the Bureau to determine the equipment required to perform inspections. The same results should be compared to the equipment actually available. Consolidate the requirements and determine the equipment shortfalls, if any. Develop a plan to acquire the necessary equipment. Have Inspectors assume responsibility and be accountable for all equipment issued. Specialty equipment should be maintained at a central location and be signed out when necessary for the conduct of certain inspections.

Response: HFD will initiate a Bureau wide study to determine what equipment will best support our mission and objectives. We anticipate to begin this study by November 2005. Approximate cost to provide functional and effective communication equipment and reasonable airtime for Inspection personnel is \$79,000.00. Without adequate funding, necessary communication equipment will not be purchased. Currently, funding for communication equipment has not been provided.

9. Issue: Wasting of assets

Observation: 93 Fujitsu Notepad computers and related equipment were purchased in June 1999 for \$471,652 on the recommendation of the Abbey Study. Approximately 80 of them have not been unpacked from their original boxes because they cannot be used without additional software. The software was requested by the Bureau in the FY 2001, 2002, and 2003 budgets, but was not funded by HFD or the City. The Bureau determined that the Fujitsu Notepad computers were outdated and of little, if any, value in the FY 2004 budget documents. This had previously been addressed by HFD and was not successfully resolved.

Recommendation: An investigation be conducted to determine: the cause of the lack of use of the Fujitsu Notepad computers; if any malfeasance occurred; if the computers are still useful to the Bureau; if not, then recommend appropriate disposition of the equipment. The Bureau should also develop procedures to prevent any reoccurrence.

Response: The former Mayor's Executive Assistant ordered the purchase of the Fujitsu notepad computers. We agree that the hardware was ill advised and even if it could be proven that it was the best available at the time of purchase, it should have been tested in a small sampling of hardware prior to purchase. We are currently testing several air cards, one to be used with a modern "Hammerhead" tablet PC using Windows XP and an additional test using the old Fujitsu tablet PC's. The results of these tests will guide our recommendation as to the feasibility and benefit of hardware versus cost.

10. Issue: Inadequate procedures to communicate critical information.

Observation: Inspectors were not made aware of properly issued subpoenas by their management in sufficient time to allow for the Inspector's attendance in court. There were 55 instances (8%) where an inspector failed to appear in court, and a reason was not given.

Recommendation: The Bureau should develop lines of communication with applicable courts and determine if email notification of subpoenas is possible. If so, the Bureau needs to develop a process to obtain the subpoenas from the courts, and deliver them to the appropriate Inspector in sufficient time to allow for the Inspector's appearance in court.

Response: The LSB has developed a policy and procedure to ensure Inspectors receive timely notification for court appearances. This policy was effective on August 2, 2005.

11. Issue: An aging fleet

Observation: The Bureau has 84 vehicles, 68% of the fleet, which exceeds the City's Vehicle Replacement criteria. As of December 31, 2004, the 84 vehicles have in excess of 122,000 miles on average. MF&R, along with the previous auditing firm (TriData) both show the necessity for Inspectors to have vehicles in order to conduct timely inspections and permit functions.

Recommendation: The Bureau in conjunction with HFD and other City Departments should develop a plan to either replace existing Bureau high mileage vehicles with more reliable existing City vehicles or "fast track" the Bureau's vehicle replacement schedule.

Response: LSB has requested and will continue to request expedited vehicle replacement. Cost for vehicles is estimated at \$255,000.00. Current funding does not include vehicle replacement. MF&R, along with the previous auditing firm (TriData), both show the necessity for Inspectors to have dependable vehicles in order to conduct timely inspections and permit functions.

12. Issue: Inadequate permit fees charged

Observation: The Bureau conducts numerous inspections related to the City's permits; however, the current fee structure does not cover all costs incurred by the City to conduct those inspections. The City's annual FY budget preparation guidance document indicates that Permit Fees are to be reviewed each year. The last review was conducted in 2002 with FY 2001 cost information.

The City's Executive Order No. 1-38: Accounts Receivable Policy (effective September 1, 2003) requires City Departments to annually review its charges for providing services to customers and citizens, Paragraph 3.4.2.

Recommendation: The Bureau, HFD, and the City should review the existing permit fee structure to ensure the Bureau is charging the appropriate fees for their services.

Response: LSB agrees with this observation and recommendation. We will immediately begin review of existing permit fees and work with the appropriate agencies to develop a revised permit fee schedule. Fee adjustments will require City Council's approval. The revised fee schedule will be presented with the adoption of the 2006 International Fire Code. This is expected to occur in 2006.