

City of Winter Park
Fire Department

Firefighters to train in behavior at work

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By Karen Pankowski 4-12-92

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — In the wake of a complaint that city firefighters watched pornographic movies on the job, the department will receive training on how to avoid sexual harassment in the workplace.

Public Safety Director Jim Younger said most fire department employees have a basic understanding of sexual harassment but management needs to be aware of subtle as well as overt forms.

"Management has to provide a businesslike working environment," Younger said Wednesday. "They do now and they have, but if they understood the total spectrum of sexual harassment there would have been no X-rated movies at all."

In a report to the city Civil Service Board Tuesday, Younger said he found firefighters had watched X-rated videotapes on the job over the years, but that the practice was infrequent and has been stopped. The most recent showing of an X-rated movie at a station happened eight to 15 months ago, he said.

The investigation was prompted by a February letter from a local lawyer that said pornographic movies in the stations subjected female employees to sexual harassment.

In his report, Younger said showing such movies could create an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment that could possibly be used as part of a sexual harassment complaint against the city.

One of the problems is that firefighters have traditionally believed the fire station is their home away from home, he said. The department, which has three female employees, also has to continue to adjust to the presence of women in its ranks, just as the police department did, he said.

"Times have changed and they have to understand it's a place of business," Younger stressed. "What we

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No more X-rated films shown at fire station

FIRE from K-1

have is a department that needs to update some of its policies and validate and standardize a corporate policy."

The department already has taken some action, Younger said. Fire officials have prohibited the showing of any X-rated films, and said that any movie or television show must be shut off if a co-worker objects because he or she believes it is offensive.

Younger instituted a sexual harassment policy for the department and appointed an officer to handle complaints.

The department also is working to update operating policies and establish new ones. For example,

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who was recently named public safety director to bring to order to the fractionalized department, said firefighters have been receptive to the changes.

The department has been rife with infighting from personnel disputes and personality clashes, especially since Chief Duane Mehl left last fall. But Younger said morale has improved.

On Tuesday, Civil Service Board members said there was no need to investigate further, and several firefighters seemed to agree.

"I'm glad it's over and I think it was done fairly," said Battalion Chief Jim Knackert, who admitted he brought in an X-rated tape several years ago. "Everyone got a chance to speak."

fire officials are establishing competency-based testing requirements and, along with members of the Winter Park Firefighters Union, setting physical fitness standards, he said.

Younger, the city's police chief