

Personal & Family Relationships in the Workplace

Date Adopted: May 1, 2018
Date Last Revised: May 7, 2018
Revision Number: 1
Issued By: Assist. Chief Ralph Ketron
Approved By: Chief Robert Dilallo
Effective: June 1, 2018
Total Pages: 4

Purpose: The following Standard Operating Policy (SOP) is to establish policy and procedure governing personal and family relationships in the workplace. The purpose of this policy is to foster a professional working environment for all within the District, as well as the philosophy that prioritizes the District's operational objectives as determined by management in an impartial and consistent manner for all District employees.

Table of Contents:

- 100.09.01 – Definitions
- 100.09.02 – Personal & Family Relationships in the Workplace
- 100.09.03 – Guidelines & Complaint Procedure

100.09.01– Definitions

For purposes of this SOP, the following definitions shall apply.

- 01.1.**FAMILY** – Refers to all relatives, including but not limited to: past and present spouses, past and present domestic partners, relatives by marriage, children (including biological, foster and step-children), parents, step-parents, grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, siblings (including adoptive or step-siblings), cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles.
- 01.2.**PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP** – Refers to an intimate, sexual, or dating relationship.

100.09.02 – Personal & Family Relationships in the Workplace

- 02.1. The District recognizes that a spirit of camaraderie among its members is beneficial to morale. The District also recognizes that personal or other relationships may develop due to a working relationship. As a paramilitary organization, however, it is paramount that the District and its employees be aware of the fact that informal structures of influence or power may be created due to such relationships within the organization which may have the potential to affect adversely the

professional and personal relationships of those involved, others on-duty, or the District's ability to effectively supervise and manage its workforce.

The purpose of this policy is to foster a professional working environment for all within the District, as well as the philosophy that prioritizes the District's operational objectives as determined by management in an impartial and consistent manner for all District employees. Management of the District must ensure that operational needs of the District, and the safety of its employees as well as the public are being prioritized. Therefore, the protection, preservation or prioritization of any personal preferences, personal relationships or familial relationships of those within the District are neither management's obligation nor responsibility. It is District policy that any such personal relationships, familial relationships or personal preferences shall not interfere with or adversely impact management's ability to effectively operate, supervise or manage the District and/or its employees, including but not limited to management's discretion on staffing, shift changes, station changes, scheduling, or other operational, investigatory or disciplinary matters. It shall be inappropriate and a violation of this policy for any relationship (personal, familial or preferential) to interfere with or influence adversely the District's operations or management discretion in any manner.

Further, to the extent current District employees engage in any type of off-duty relationship, such involvement between employees/volunteers must be voluntary and desired by both parties. This is because many operational or morale problems have developed in fire departments and other emergency service organizations because of dating or other personal relationships, resulting in uncomfortable strain or hostility, as well as perceived and/or actual favoritism, potential misconduct, allegations of sexual harassment and other workplace distractions that can interfere with the District's goal of ensuring a professional work environment. Specifically, as stated in this policy, a supervisor/subordinate with personal or familial relationships can create an environment that may negatively impact the work performance of the supervisor/subordinate and/or others. As such, it may have the same influence or effect as harassment.

For these reasons, if a relationship is no longer desired by one or both of the previously consenting individuals, it is imperative that a firm and definite end to the relationship be communicated. After this firm and definite communication has been made, it is inappropriate for the other party to make any further attempt to initiate a personal relationship. Repeated unwanted or unwelcome requests for a personal relationship may constitute sexual or other forms of harassment in violation of District SOP 100.07, Discriminatory Workplace Harassment Policy and Complaint Procedure.

Finally, to the extent personal or familial relationships exist between employees who work on the same shift (even if not at the same station), this policy prohibits such employees from regularly working on the same shift in the same division or same battalion. These relationships, even when they are consensual, mutual or longstanding, can create compromising conflicts of interest or the appearance of such a conflict, along with the potential for other adverse effects on the workplace.

100.09.03 – Guidelines & Complaint Procedure

- 03.1. Personnel who desire to become involved with another employee in the workplace must be aware of the following general guidelines:

- a) There shall be no dating or other personal business (i.e. non-District) activities on department time or department property;
- b) There shall be no use of department property to arrange dating or other personal business (i.e. non-District) activities.
- c) All behavior between employees shall be behavior conducive to a sound professional work environment at all times when on department property or on department time. Hand holding, kissing, hugging, comments and other behavior generally associated with a dating or other personal and/or personal business relationship are inappropriate while on department time or department property.
- d) Uniformed members who are family members or are in a personal relationship as defined hereunder this SOP:
 - 1. cannot work in the same fire station;
 - 2. cannot work on the same shift in the same division or battalion;
 - 3. cannot be directly supervised by the family member or the other person in the relationship; and
 - 4. cannot work in the direct chain of command unless authorized by the Fire Chief or his/her designee.
- e) Uniformed members in staff positions and/or civilians who are family members or are in a personal relationship:
 - 1. cannot be directly supervised by the family member or the other person in the relationship; and
 - 2. cannot work in the direct chain of command unless authorized by the Fire Chief or his/her designee.
- f) Any type of relationship involving personnel (i.e. personal, familial or other) at different levels on the chain of command (or where one party has functional supervision over another) shall be reported by the person of higher rank (or greater longevity) to his/her supervisor immediately. Failure to report this relationship is a violation of this policy. The supervisor receiving this information shall immediately contact his or her supervisor to inform of the relationship. Personnel shall contact the chief officer and make recommendations to ensure that this relationship complies with the terms of this policy, and otherwise will not detract from a professional work environment. Such recommendations may include, but not be limited to, the transfer of the higher-ranking person to another shift.

However, when a personal, familial or other relationship becomes public knowledge through self-disclosure, by virtue of its impact on one's own work performance, due to possible conflict of interest, or due to adverse effects on the morale of others in the workforce, it must be reported by the person of higher rank (or greater longevity) to his/her supervisor immediately. Failure to report this relationship is a violation of this policy. The supervisor receiving this information shall immediately contact his or her supervisor to inform of the relationship. The

information reported will be reviewed in light of all the facts (reporting relationship between the members, effect on co-workers, job titles of the members, etc.) in order to determine further action.

- g) Exceptions to this policy shall exist for temporary, non-repetitive, or occasional situations including but not limited to training evolutions; emergency scene operations; traveling or non-operations added time; and an occasional (i.e. not regular, repeating and/or permanent in effect) mutual exchange, where a supervisory relationship may be allowed to exist for the identified situation only, subject to management discretion. However, any attempt by an employee to circumvent the intent of this policy through means that adversely impact or influence the District's operations and/or other employees in the District, as solely determined by District management, shall be deemed a violation of this policy.
- h) With regards to new hires or cadets/explorers/students/volunteers or probationary firefighters, due to the tenuous nature of initial employment or engagement, and/or the perceived need by such individuals to defer unduly or excessively to the existing rank structure, sworn members are strictly prohibited from initiating any type of personal relationship whatsoever with any cadet/explore/student/volunteer or probationary firefighter, regardless of the member's current assignment or rank.
- i) **Complaint Procedure.** Any District employee, cadet/explorer/student/volunteer who believes his or her terms and conditions of employment and/or engagement are being negatively or adversely affected as a result of a District employee's violation of this policy shall promptly report any such concerns pursuant to the Complaint Procedure contained in District SOP 100.07.00 Discriminatory Workplace Harassment Policy and Compliance Procedure.
- j) A violation of this policy may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including termination from employment of one and/or all of the offending employee(s).