



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:
{{item.tracking_number}}

Agenda Item Number: 15

Agenda Date: December 6, 2022

In Control: Audit and Accountability Committee Meeting

DEPARTMENT: Office of the City Auditor

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Kevin Barthold

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Acceptance of the Office of the City Auditor Report AU22-018 Audit of SAFD Arson Bureau

SUMMARY:

Determine if Arson Bureau operations comply with policies and procedures and whether case management is effective and timely.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Background

The Arson Bureau (Bureau) is responsible for investigating the cause of fires and explosions within the city limits of San Antonio. It also investigates fire-related deaths, life threatening burn injuries, suspected explosive devices, and bomb threats.

Fire investigations are often divided into two parts: 1) determining the cause of the fire; and 2) if

the cause is arson, conducting a criminal investigation to bring the perpetrator(s) to justice. Bureau investigators determine the cause of vehicle fires and more complex cases of structure fires. Bureau investigators are fire fighters, certified arson investigators, and certified peace officers. They are the only SAFD members involved in conducting criminal investigations once the cause of a fire is established as arson. They are responsible for filing cases with the Bexar County Criminal District Attorney's Office for arson and related crimes such as criminal mischief, possession of explosive devices, hoax bombs, insurance fraud, and homicide.

Scope & Methodology

The audit scope was October 1, 2020 through January 31, 2022 as well as current practices and conditions.

We interviewed Bureau staff; conducted physical inventory tests; reviewed draft policies and procedures and state laws and regulations; tested calculations of performance measures; and tested user access to the evidence tracking software. We also compared the contents of FileOnQ for the "Temporary Evidence Locker" and "Out to Lab" locations to the actual contents of the Arson Temporary Evidence Locker.

Conclusions

The Bureau is effectively managing its case load in a timely manner. It is also effectively managing its equipment inventory and tracking its case closure rate. However, the Bureau's evidence inventory is inaccurate, employee access to the evidence tracking software system is not always appropriate, and the temporary evidence room is lacking a security camera. Additionally, the Bureau's policies and procedures are still in draft mode and are incomplete.

We recommend that the Fire Chief:

- Conduct a full inventory of the Bureau's evidence locations, purge evidence that is no longer needed and items that are not evidence, and develop and implement policies and procedures for evidence handling in accordance with standards promulgated by the International Association of Property and Evidence, Inc.
- Install a surveillance camera in the Arson Temporary Evidence Locker and develop and implement a policy for periodic review of video footage.
- Define and implement FileOnQ roles that are appropriate for the duties of Bureau employees and conform to the principle of least privilege. Also, conduct periodic reviews of FileOnQ users to ensure only current Arson employees have access.
- Develop, approve, and implement policies and procedures that ensure the Bureau's processes conform with laws, regulations, and best practices for both firefighting and police operations.
- Develop and implement policies and procedures for addressing complaints against arson investigators.
- Develop tracking performance metrics that reflect the entirety of the Bureau's responsibilities.

SAFD Management agreed with the audit findings and has developed positive action plans to

address them.

ISSUE:

This item is presented for acceptance by the Audit and Accountability Committee.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None

ALTERNATIVES:

N/A

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends acceptance of this audit report.