



RON GALPERIN
CONTROLLER

November 10, 2022

Honorable Eric Garcetti, Mayor
Honorable Michael Feuer, City Attorney
Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council

Re: Follow-Up Audit — In Case of Emergency: The City’s Disaster Service Worker Program

In January 2019, my office released the report, “In Case of Emergency: The City’s Disaster Service Worker Program,” which examined the City’s Disaster Service Worker (DSW) program and its efficacy in preparing employees to serve in support of the City’s emergency response efforts. The report found that many components of the program were nonexistent or incomplete.

Since then, the City has made limited progress in improving the program—four recommendations from our report have been either implemented or partially implemented, while three more are in progress. Clear opportunities remain to improve the program by developing better protocols for deployment and clarifying consequences for failure to comply with mandatory training and DSW assignments.

Given the importance of ensuring that Los Angeles can effectively respond to any crisis, my office initiated this follow-up review to assess the City’s implementation of the initial report’s recommendations. The table below summarizes our evaluation of the City’s ongoing efforts:

2019 Recommendations	Status	Comments
Develop standard trainings for all staff responsible for deploying DSWs in their departments in order to review DSW requirements, policies and procedures, available toolkits, and any guidance for selecting and deploying employees to DSW duties during an emergency.	Implemented	Personnel has created a training video that provides information about the role Department Personnel Officers (DPOs) play in DSW deployment. Personnel will assign this training video to DPOs annually as a refresher.

<p>Test DSW deployment processes as part of the City's annual EOC activation drills by communicating activation roles and responsibilities, with a select number of departments and employees being contacted.</p>	<p>Implemented</p>	<p>The Emergency Management Department (EMD) now tests the DSW program as part of their annual Emergency Operations Center activation exercise. EMD should continue to test DSW deployments on a regular basis to verify departments' employee mobilization and deployment capabilities.</p>
<p>Establish a method to prioritize departments and/or individual employees for DSW assignment/deployment.</p>	<p><i>Partially Implemented</i></p>	<p>Personnel currently uses the bench list created to support the City's COVID-19 response as its primary method of prioritization. However, this one time-survey does not fully satisfy the intent of the recommendation since the list is only effective throughout the duration of the City's pandemic response.</p>
<p>Include DSW requirements in City job postings, and ensure that all employees are aware that disciplinary action(s) may be taken if an employee does not comply with a directive to serve as a DSW if they are reassigned from their regular job to specific DSW duties.</p>	<p><i>Partially Implemented</i></p>	<p>City job bulletins currently state that City employees are required to serve as DSWs. Employees are also required to sign a DSW acknowledgement form. EMD is in the process of developing an official memorandum describing DSW requirements and policies.</p>
<p>Require departments to maintain a complete and current listing of their employees' contact information, including skillsets and other relevant information.</p>	<p><i>In progress</i></p>	<p>Executive Directive 26 required all City departments to identify a minimum of 10 percent of their employees for a DSW bench list that can be made available immediately. Personnel manages the Citywide bench list, but does not have a process to regularly update it.</p>
<p>Update existing DSW training, providing more detail on possible roles and responsibilities, and require all City employees to take</p>	<p><i>In progress</i></p>	<p>DSW training courses are currently available on Cornerstone, the City's online training platform. All employees are required to</p>

refresher training on a regularly scheduled basis.		complete an initial course during onboarding which provides an overview of the DSW program. Additional refresher videos are available to all City employees but are not yet required.
Establish protocols for effective monitoring and compliance reporting for required refresher DSW training.	<i>In progress</i>	Cornerstone is equipped with a reporting feature to track training completion. Personnel and DPOs can generate reports to monitor training progress. To help enforce compliance, Personnel plans to establish annual due dates for refresher training.

There is still much work ahead in order to enhance our City’s disaster response readiness. Continued development of the DSW program is necessary to mitigate the impact of the next crisis event. I urge the City to continue seeking lasting solutions to address the gaps in its emergency response efforts.

Sincerely,



RON GALPERIN
L.A. Controller

In Case of Emergency: The City's Disaster Service Worker Program



Follow-Up Audit — In Case of Emergency: The City’s Disaster Service Worker Program



SUMMARY

In response to local emergencies, the City of Los Angeles (City) deploys firefighters, police officers, and other first responders as its first line of defense. Recognized volunteer organizations such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) are also available if disaster relief efforts are needed. **However, when the resources required for response and recovery after an emergency greatly exceeds existing capacity, the City can call upon its civilian employees to provide additional support through the Disaster Service Worker program.** State law and City policy designate all City employees as Disaster Service Workers (DSWs) who must always be willing, ready, and able to train and serve in support of the City’s emergency response.

In January 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Office initiated a review of the DSW program and found that many components of the program remained nonexistent or incomplete. The review included recommendations for the City to further develop policies and procedures required to effectively facilitate the deployment of DSWs during or immediately after an emergency.

The purpose of this report is to follow-up on the City’s progress in implementing recommendations from the January 2019 review. Although the DSW program was activated for the first time in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—and several of the issues we originally identified proved problematic—the City’s pandemic response efforts are not the primary focus of this report.

Follow-Up Results

The City made limited progress in implementing the prior recommendations and has yet to fully address the risks identified in our previous review. **Four recommendations have been either implemented or partially implemented, and three recommendations are in progress.** EMD and the Personnel Department still lack important employee information and pre-planned deployment methodologies for DSW activations, and consequences for failing to comply with mandatory training and DSW assignments are unclear. The City should continue its efforts to implement recommendations that are currently in progress to improve the DSW program’s efficiency and effectiveness.

BACKGROUND

The City's Disaster Service Worker Program

Pursuant to California State law, Mayor Villaraigosa issued Executive Directive 16 (ED 16) in 2011 to declare all non-sworn City employees as DSWs that will serve in times of need. All civilian City employees sign an Affirmation of Loyalty during the hiring process, and documentation is filed with the City's Personnel Department (Personnel) and the employee's own department. Every registered employee—regardless of classification—is required to complete DSW training, including periodic refresher training.

Scope of Disaster Service Duties – Employees acting as DSWs may be reassigned to perform a variety of critical support roles outside the scope of their normal job duties and schedules, but they are never expected to perform any duty or function beyond their ability or skill set. Prior to deployments, DSWs are provided with training and protective equipment (if necessary) to allow them to complete their assigned duties safely. General DSW duties include, but are not limited to:

- clerical support;
- answering phone lines;
- delivering supplies;
- preparing and serving food; and
- managing volunteers.

DSWs may also be assigned or choose to volunteer for more specific disaster response duties such as working in City emergency operations centers or a Red Cross shelter.

DSW Deployment Process – Upon official proclamation of a local emergency, the Mayor can activate the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC), where the Emergency Management Department (EMD) coordinates emergency response activities between key City departments, regional organizations, and outside agencies. Field responders request resources and assistance from DSWs through the EOC, and the EOC's Personnel Unit first fulfills requests with EOC representatives and people formally trained and registered to engage in disaster service. If additional staff resources are necessary, the EOC can advise the Mayor to activate the DSW program to fill operational needs.

Upon the Mayor's official activation of the DSW program, the EOC's Logistics and Personnel section representatives are tasked with compiling a list of mission needs or tasks to determine

the type and number of DSWs required, necessary skills, and reporting locations. The EOC then submits the request to the Personnel Department, which contacts Department Personnel Officers (DPOs) of individual City departments. DPOs, who manage personnel functions in their respective departments, identify appropriate and available employees and assign DSWs until all requested positions have been filled.

COVID-19 Activation

In March 2020, the City activated the DSW program for the first time as part of its COVID-19 pandemic response. Almost every City department deployed DSWs to help with urgent missions, including contact tracing, sheltering unhoused residents, and assisting the Los Angeles Unified School District's relief efforts. **Nearly 5,000 City employees served in various emergency missions across the City, covering approximately 50,000 different shifts, operating 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.** The DSW program remains activated and continues to support the City's COVID-19 response missions.

However, the DSW deployment process proved to be difficult for the Personnel Department due to its own staffing constraints, the sheer volume of DSWs needed, refusals by employees to carry out DSW duties due to health concerns, and the amount of coordination required to ensure City employees assigned as DSWs remained safe amidst the pandemic. Before a DSW deployment could proceed, Personnel representatives and requesting departments planned everything from meal accommodations to personal protective equipment and safety measures.

In June 2020, Mayor Garcetti issued Executive Directive 26 (ED 26) to clarify how the DSW program would be administered throughout the duration of the emergency. The directive included the following instructions:

- a task force led by the Office of the Mayor, in consultation with Personnel and comprised of EMD and other department representatives, is tasked with administering DSW program operations;
- Personnel shall work with EMD to ensure disaster training is approved, documented and supervised, and commensurate with DSW duties; and
- all department heads must identify a minimum of 10% of their respective workforces in Continuity of Operations Plans (COOPs) for a DSW bench list that can be made available immediately.

It is important to note that while the Personnel coordinates and tracks deployments for the DSW program citywide, some departments may deploy DSWs independently of the program to support their own departmental missions. For example, the Department of Recreation and

Parks (RAP) acts as the lead department for mass care during an emergency. As a result, RAP has deployed their own DSWs to help operate interim housing at Project Roomkey sites. Personnel will not reassign an employee as a DSW from departments that have already dedicated staff to support the continuity of critical functions.

The City's first-ever real world DSW activation and the challenges it has encountered administering the program highlight not only the program weaknesses we found during our previous review, but the need for clear policies, prepared employees, and processes that allow for the smooth, rapid deployment of DSWs.

KEY ISSUES FROM 2019 REVIEW

Insufficient Deployment Policies and Procedures

The EOC's Personnel representatives are responsible for working with City departments to identify staff to deploy to the location of an emergency event, but **the City had no true database of complete and current employee contact information to efficiently facilitate the assignment and deployment of DSWs.** Individual City departments were expected to collect and maintain contact information for their employees. Since some City employees cannot be diverted from essential or critical department functions, departments must identify which employees are available for temporary reassignment.

In a Controller survey of ten departments, the methods for reaching out to employees for DSW deployment varied. Some departments planned to extract contact information from the City's payroll system, or collect information directly from employees and transfer data into a departmental database or spreadsheet. Other departments assumed they would be able to rely on supervisors to have contact information for their staff.

Without access to current and complete employee information, **the City lacked a method to prioritize specific departments, employees, or skillsets for DSW assignment.** In a 2015 training exercise that simulated a DSW activation, the Personnel Department did not have a plan for identifying and prioritizing departments or employees and resorted to selecting departments in alphabetical order. In a real-world activation, this presents logistics challenges and can impact the timeliness of necessary deployments.

Lack of Employee Awareness

ED 16 requires all employees registered as DSWs to complete DSW training, including periodic refresher training, to enhance skills necessary for engaging in designated DSW activities. At the

time of the previous review, EMD had developed one mandatory online training course that all new employees were required to complete within 30 days of hire. The training informed employees of their obligation to comply with the DSW program and administered an oath of loyalty.

A supplemental training course, intended to be viewed prior to DSW assignment, was also made available. However, **the City had not established regular refresher training for employees to revisit DSW program requirements, and not all employees were aware of potential duties they might be asked to perform as DSWs. Additionally, there were no protocols that clearly defined when and how compliance with mandatory training should be enforced, or the range of potential disciplinary actions that should take place if employees fail to comply with DSW obligations.**

To assist DPOs, EMD and Personnel developed a “DSW Toolkit,” with instructions, checklists, and forms to be used during a DSW activation. The toolkit provides examples of various jobs that a DSW may perform, but it was only shared with DPOs, and all ten departments surveyed by the Controller’s Office appeared to be unaware of it.

DSW Deployments Were Not Regularly Practiced During Exercises

Each year, the EOC conducts a large-scale functional exercise, often in conjunction with other agencies, that simulates various emergency scenarios so the City can identify opportunities to improve its response to catastrophic events. Regularly testing the DSW program helps to reinforce field responders’ awareness of DSWs as a resource option, and allows them to familiarize themselves with the request and deployment process.

Since the inception of the DSW program, the City only held one drill that simulated the deployment of DSWs and tested the program’s capabilities. That drill took place during the EOC’s 2015 Functional Exercise. EMD’s after-action report for the exercise indicated that Personnel reached out to participating DPOs to identify potential DSWs, but representatives did not actually contact any employees in their respective departments. In addition, the exercise failed to properly gauge employee response, establish methods of prioritization, and fully identify potential issues.

RECOMMENDATION FOLLOW-UP

The City made progress in improving the DSW program, but has yet to fully address the risks identified in our previous review:

- two recommendations have been **implemented**;
- two recommendations have been **partially implemented** (the department has partially implemented the recommendation, but will not take further action); and
- three recommendations are **in progress** (the department continues to work toward full implementation).

EMD and Personnel still lack employee information and pre-planned deployment methodologies for DSW activations. To ensure the City is able to reach employees during DSW activations and efficiently deploy staffing resources, EMD and Personnel must develop Citywide methods or standards for individual departments to collect and maintain sufficient employee contact information. Furthermore, there are generally no consequences for not participating in mandatory training or complying with DSW assignments, which increases the likelihood of employees either failing to report for their mandatory service to the public, or being unprepared when they report for service.

1. All City departments should be required to maintain a complete and current listing of their employees’ contact information, including skillsets and other relevant information. A uniform method by which employees can update and self-certify their DSW information online would be optimal. Employee DSW information should be maintained in a cloud-based customer relationship management software (CRM) program that can be available to the EOC.

Status: In progress

Target Date:
To be determined

Contact Information – ED26 required all City departments to identify a minimum of 10% of their respective workforces for a DSW bench list that can be made available immediately. The Personnel Department manages the Citywide bench list, but does not have a process to regularly update it. For future DSW activations, Personnel would need to contact DPOs to gather updated contact information. According to the Personnel Department, it is exploring the feasibility of allowing employees to self-certify some DSW information within Workday, the City’s new human capital system. However, DPOs will always play a central role in gathering and confirming contact information.

Skillsets – When the DSW program was first activated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Personnel distributed a one-time citywide survey to collect skillset information from employees

and established a current skills list. Specialized skills might include fluency in other languages, vehicle licenses, certifications, or the ability to use or supply specific equipment. Personnel plans to issue annual reminders for employees to update their information and can re-issue the survey in preparation for an activation. The department reports that it is working with ITA to assess the feasibility of incorporating a skillset self-certification process into Workday.

2. The Personnel Department should partner with the Emergency Management Department to establish a method to prioritize departments and/or individual employees for DSW assignment/deployment. Considerations could be based on job classifications and departmental function(s), skill sets, preferred job/duties, relevant limitations, and home or work location, to best meet the specific needs of an emergency or disaster.

Status: Partially implemented

As required by ED 26, City departments have identified 10% of their respective workforces for a DSW bench list that can be made available immediately to support the City’s COVID-19 response. Personnel currently uses this list, which includes basic information about employee classifications, as its primary method of prioritization. **However, this one time-survey does not fully satisfy the intent of the recommendation since the list is only effective throughout the duration of the City’s pandemic response.**

According to EMD and Personnel, determinations as to which skillsets or City classifications are best suited for an emergency mission are made at the time of the activation and based on the emergency need. The departments also determined that unless special skills are required for the assignments, all City employees should be able to perform DSW duties with just-in-time training, even if duties are outside their usual job classification roles.

3. EMD and Personnel should update existing DSW training, providing more detail on possible roles and responsibilities, and require all City employees to take refresher training on a regularly scheduled basis.

Status: In progress

Target Date: 11/2022

DSW training courses are currently available on Cornerstone, the City’s online training platform. All employees are required to complete an initial Mandatory Loyalty Oath Training course during employee onboarding which provides an overview of the DSW program. Personnel plans to reassign this course annually within Cornerstone and establish due dates.

EMD and Personnel have also developed four new DSW refresher training course videos since the issuance of ED 26. These videos include:

- Part 1: Activation and Deactivation;
- Part 2: Employee and Family Preparedness;
- Part 3: Possible Locations and Roles; and
- Part 4: Resilience and Psychological First Aid.

The courses are available to all City employees but are not yet required. EMD and Personnel plan to require the training within Cornerstone beginning in November 2022.

4. The Personnel Department should establish protocols for effective monitoring and compliance reporting for required refresher DSW training.

Status: In progress

Target Date: 1/2023

Cornerstone is equipped with a reporting feature to track training completion. Personnel and DPOs can generate reports to monitor training progress. To help enforce compliance, Personnel plans to establish annual due dates for refresher training, which would be prompted by notifications sent through Cornerstone. Personnel plans to monitor training compliance on a quarterly basis beginning in January 2023.

5. The Personnel Department should develop standard trainings for all staff responsible for deploying DSWs in their departments in order to review DSW requirements, policies and procedures, available toolkits, and any guidance for selecting and deploying employees to DSW duties during an emergency.

Status: Implemented

Personnel has created a training video for DPOs entitled, “DSW Personnel Directors” that provides information about the role DPOs play in DSW deployment. Personnel will assign this

training video to DPOs annually as a refresher. Personnel has also updated the DSW Toolkit resource for DPOs. The toolkit is available on Personnel’s intranet site. The department plans to update the toolkit on an ongoing basis moving forward.

6. The Personnel Department should include DSW requirements in City job postings, and ensure that all employees are aware that disciplinary action(s) may be taken if an employee does not comply with a directive to serve as a DSW if they are reassigned from their regular job to specific DSW duties.

Status: Partially implemented

City job bulletins currently state that City employees are required to serve as DSWs. While Personnel is limited in the amount of additional details they can include on job bulletins, DPOs and managers communicate are expected to convey additional DSW information to employees when they accept an offer of employment. Employees are also required to sign a DSW acknowledgement form.

EMD is in the process of developing an official memorandum describing DSW requirements and policies. According to Personnel, an employee that fails to fulfill a DSW assignment may be subject to disciplinary action based on the City’s existing personnel policies for insubordination.

7. EMD and the Personnel Department should test DSW deployment processes as part of the City’s annual EOC activation drills by communicating activation roles and responsibilities, with a select number of departments and employees being contacted.

Status: Implemented

According to EMD’s Training and Exercises Division, EMD now tests the DSW program as part of their annual EOC activation exercise. EMD reports that the exercise tests numerous scenarios to prepare the Personnel Department Operations Center and the EOC’s Personnel Unit Leader. EMD should continue to test DSW deployments on a regular basis to verify departments’ employee mobilization and deployment capabilities.