
Organizational Structure/Chain of Command

200.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish the organizational structure of the Blue Ridge Fire District. This policy also provides guidance regarding the district's reporting process through the chain of command.

200.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Blue Ridge Fire District to organize its resources in a manner that allows for effective and efficient service delivery to the public. To ensure effective organizational communication, members should generally adhere to the established chain of command unless there is a good faith and reasonable basis for utilizing an alternate channel of communication.

200.3 DIVISIONS

The Fire Chief is responsible for managing the Blue Ridge Fire District. The following Divisions make up the Blue Ridge Fire District:

- Administration Division
- Operations Division

200.3.1 ADMINISTRATION DIVISION

The Administration Division is directed by and provides administrative support for the Fire Chief; prepares and coordinates the district budget; acts as liaison regarding recruitment, promotion and performance appraisals; manages information technology systems and payroll functions; and reviews, prepares and presents staff reports to the District, the District staff and District officials.

200.3.2 OPERATIONS DIVISION

The Operations Division is directed by the Fire Chief. The Operations Division responds to all fire, rescue and medical aid calls for service; manages major disaster responses; and staffs various emergency response apparatus and support units.

The Operations Division may also oversee the management of Dispatch.

200.4 UNITY OF COMMAND

The principles of unity of command ensure efficient supervision and control within the District. Generally, each member is accountable to a single supervisor at any time for a given assignment or responsibility. Except where specifically delegated or where authority exists by virtue of policy or a special assignment (e.g., emergency incidents), any supervisor may temporarily direct the subordinate of another supervisor if an operational need exists.

200.5 CHAIN OF COMMAND

Respect for rank is essential for administrative and operational efficiency. All members of the Blue Ridge Fire District shall adhere to the chain of command. All members shall be thoroughly familiar

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with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) and operate within their parameters throughout the duration of all emergency incidents.

A supervising or commanding officer will be identified for each district member. This supervisor/commanding officer is the first step in the organizational chain of command, followed by the next level of commanding officer as set forth in the district's organizational structure. In the event that no supervisory officer is available, rank will be determined by seniority in rank.

Members of the Blue Ridge Fire District shall generally conduct district business through the established chain of command. Members shall consult with and report to their commanding officer/supervisor when making recommendations for changes, alterations or improvements concerning district matters. Members shall forward all reports and recommendations through the chain of command. The submission should include written comments from the member's immediate supervisor to indicate whether he/she approves of the recommendation. No memo or recommendation should be stopped in the chain of command before it reaches its intended destination/officer.

Other than the exceptions set forth below, no member of the Blue Ridge Fire District shall initiate contact with any member of the governing board or with any other local, regional, state or federal official regarding any matter affecting the Blue Ridge Fire District without having first informed the Fire Chief through the chain of command.

200.6 DIRECTIVES AND ORDERS

Members shall comply with lawful directives and orders from any district supervisor or person in a position of authority, absent a reasonable and bona fide justification.

A member who believes any written or verbal order to be unlawful or in conflict with another order shall:

- (a) Immediately inform the supervisor issuing the order, and also the member's immediate supervisor or the Fire Chief, of the conflict or error of the order.
- (b) Provide details explaining the grounds for believing there is a conflict or error.
- (c) Request clarification, guidance and direction regarding following the order.
- (d) Request the order in writing, absent exigent circumstances, should the conflict or perceived error be unresolved.
- (e) Respectfully inform the supervisor that he/she intends to disobey what he/she reasonably believes to be a conflicting or unlawful order.

A member's decision to disobey an order that he/she believes to be unlawful is not a bar to discipline should the order be determined as lawful.

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200.7 ALTERNATE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

All members shall endeavor to keep their supervisors informed of any matters that may affect the safety, welfare or operations of the District.

As a general matter, any concern about a workplace situation should first be raised with the member's immediate supervisor. It is recognized, however, that there may be occasions where the use of the established chain of command may not be appropriate. If an issue is of a personal nature, involves a sensitive matter, is of significant importance to the District or involves other members or supervisors, the member may consult directly with the Fire Chief or a representative of the Fire Chief.

All members are free to make or prepare to make, in good faith, any complaint that identifies ethical or legal violations, including fraud, waste, abuse of authority, gross mismanagement, violations of the law or practices that may pose a threat to the health, safety and security of the public or members without fear of actual or threatened discrimination, retaliation or reprisal. Such complaints are not subject to the chain of command and may be made to any supervisor or directly to the Fire Chief. Nothing in this policy shall diminish the rights or remedies of a member pursuant to any applicable federal law, provision of the U.S. Constitution, applicable state law, ordinance or collective bargaining agreement.

Any form of reprisal or retaliation against any member for making or filing a complaint in good faith or for participating in the investigation of a complaint is prohibited. Any member engaging in any form or type of reprisal or retaliation is subject to discipline (see the Anti-Retaliation Policy).