

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO**  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

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SUBJECT: **EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE**

POLICY NUMBER: **1004**

EFFECTIVE DATE: **June 1, 1990**

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REVISED DATE: **February 2010**

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**POLICY**

It is County policy to motivate its officers and employees to perform efficiently and effectively through positive encouragement and recognition for satisfactory, above standard and outstanding job performance. However, the issues of unacceptable job performance, misconduct or violation of County policies and procedures must be addressed and may result in disciplinary action. Officers and employees of the County have the responsibility to provide service to the public in an appropriate manner. They are, therefore, expected to exercise judgment and discretion and observe established and accepted standards of personal behavior in the performance of duties and responsibilities.

**APPLICATION**

This policy covers all officers and employees of the County of San Diego and must be applied equitably in dealing with issues involving employee job performance and conduct that may call for disciplinary action.

**PROCEDURES**

A. **Forms of Disciplinary Action**

The forms of disciplinary action provided for in County rules and regulations in progressive order of magnitude are as follows:

1. **Informal Discipline**
  - Counseling
  - Oral Warning
  - Written Warning
2. **Formal Discipline**
  - Reprimand
  - Transfer to another position in same class
  - Suspension without pay or with reduced pay
  - Demotion (reduction in rank or pay)
  - Termination (removal)

(Performance reports are not considered a disciplinary device. However, ratings of "improvement needed" or "unsatisfactory" performance or conduct on a regular or supplemental report can support disciplinary action).

B. **Progressive Discipline**

Progressive discipline is characterized by the following:

- Addressing unacceptable job performance or conduct with a corrective and rehabilitative (rather than punitive) approach.
- Addressing unacceptable job performance or conduct with informal disciplinary action appropriate to the situation.
- Addressing continuing or repeated instances of unacceptable job performance or conduct with increasingly stringent forms of disciplinary action available, as appropriate.

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- Instances of unacceptable job performance or conduct which are serious may require formal disciplinary action at the outset to provide an appropriate remedy, or to protect the County or other employees.

**C. Informal Discipline**

Counseling and oral and written warnings are the most widely used methods of maintaining appropriate standards and are the first steps in progressive discipline. Counseling is the most common, and usually is the most positive and timely means of addressing unacceptable performance. Counseling should be characterized by:

- A clear statement of the unacceptable aspects of employee job performance or conduct.
- A tone of inquiry rather than accusation.
- Opportunity by the employee for explanation, presentation of mitigating circumstances, etc.
- A re-statement of expected standards of job performance and conduct.
- Confidentiality and privacy with respect to location and subject of discussion.

**D. Formal Discipline**

The more severe forms of disciplinary action i.e., written reprimand, suspension, demotion and termination, must be administered appropriately according to established County rules and regulations. It is essential that the appointing authority or his/her designee carefully assess each instance of unacceptable performance or conduct in a precise and thorough manner, consulting their Departmental Human Resources Officer and/or Group HR Director, as necessary. The patient, diligent, consistent, equitable, and appropriate application of County rules and regulations are the foundation for exercising effective discipline. An appointing authority who is considering disciplinary action and who desires additional guidance on the applicable policies or procedures, may contact the Labor Relations Division, Department of Human Resources, for assistance. Labor Relations will contact County Counsel as appropriate.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

For further information, contact the Labor Relations Division at (619) 531-5160.

**REFERENCES**

San Diego County Charter, Sections 500.3, 703.1, 803.1, 900, 901, 904.1 and 904.2.  
Civil Service Rule VII, Sections 7.1-7.13.

**APPROVED BY:**

***Original document approved and signed by Carlos G. Arauz on 2/10/2010.***

Carlos G. Arauz, Director  
Department of Human Resources