



# FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT INTERAGENCY INTERNAL AUDIT AUTHORITY

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## Memorandum

**To:** Denise Pouget  
Director/Fire Chief, Division of Fire & Rescue Services

**From:** Tricia A. Griffis, CPA  
Director, Internal Audit Division

*Tricia A. Griffis*

**Date:** July 1, 2014

**Subject:** Overtime & Telestaff Review & Analysis

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### Introduction and Summary

At the request of the Division of Fire and Rescue Services (DFRS) the Internal Audit Department (IA) performed a non-attest special project reviewing and analyzing overtime and staffing within the Department. The project also included a review of the Telestaff program along with current policies and procedures in regards to staffing held within the Department. The procedures and work performed by IA constitutes a non-attest engagement and does not fall under the guidance of Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS).

During the special project IA performed an analysis of overtime for fiscal year 2012, fiscal year 2013 and fiscal year 2014. The data collected during this analysis would allow for an understanding of overtime trends and potential abuse. During this project IA also reviewed policies and procedures related to staffing, holding over staff and overtime as well as reviewed current practices in staffing through the Telestaff system.

It is management's responsibility to design and implement an adequate system of internal control, and it is the IA's responsibility to determine if management's system of internal control is functioning properly in relation to the objectives of the special project. It is also management's responsibility to decide if action should be taken in response to any reported recommendations, taking into consideration related costs and benefits. Management, therefore, assumes the risk of making the decision not to implement any reported recommendations.

The objective of the special project was to determine if controls in place over overtime through use of policies and procedures and the Telestaff system are adequate. Recommendations made

resulting from this project will assist in the development of policies and procedures for operations in relation to formalizing staffing policies to maintain an efficient yet effective and safe staffing mechanism. The scope of the project was held to the review and analysis of fiscal year 2012, fiscal year 2013 and fiscal year 2014 straight overtime (SOT) and full overtime (FOT). A part of the project was also to gain an understanding of current policies and procedures surrounding overtime, holdovers and staffing through Telestaff as well as an understanding of the rules set up in the Telestaff staffing system. During the process of this special project IA has been working with DFRS with the review of policies and procedures surrounding overtime and Telestaff and many of the recommendations provided in this document are already in progress with DFRS.

## **Background**

Currently DFRS is under staffed in the medic and firefighter fields. At this time there are 18 vacancies along with 22 employees who are either on light duty, family medical leave act or detailed for other projects. To help alleviate these open positions DFRS has hired 16 medics that are currently going through training. Training is expected to come to completion in December 2014, however until training is complete these individuals will not be available to fill overtime positions. These openings have caused numerous staffing dilemmas and overtime for the County.

During IA's review of the staffing process we found that many career medics and firefighters (career field personnel) do not sign up for overtime. This leaves a minimal pool of individuals willing to take on overtime for the County. Most career field personnel work 48 hour work weeks totaling 192 hours per 28 day cycle. Anything over the 48 hour time period during a week goes to SOT where the career field personnel will be paid out at straight time. During a 28 day cycle if a career field personnel reaches 20 hours of SOT they are bumped to FOT (overtime is paid out at time and a half). The same pool of career personnel signing up for overtime and open positions are moving to FOT during the 28 day cycles causing the County additional funds where it is not necessary had a larger pool of individuals signed up in Telestaff to cover open positions. For safety concerns career field personnel are required by the department to be off for 12 full hours after any 48 hour straight shift. This is considered a regular day off (RDO). During IA's review of these policies and procedures we found that there are no policies in place that require schedulers to determine coverage on a cost effective manner (determining staffing based on salary and use of SOT versus FOT). Prior to current scheduling practices DFRS utilized a code messaging system where stations and Battalion Chiefs covered their open positions, this system was not streamlined and decisions were left to multiple individuals for coverage. This system also caused individuals to wait for a message notification rather than utilizing the Telestaff system to sign up to cover a position.

These open positions along with sick and vacation leave requests are causing scheduling issues. DFRS has traditionally scheduled out staffing 21 days in advance. Recently Telestaff scheduling was reduced to 9 days in advance causing concern over personal schedules and further reducing the number of staff signing up for overtime in Telestaff. The reduction to 9 days was a result of the large number of open positions and last minute sick calls to alleviate schedulers having to re perform scheduling on a daily basis. . IA walked through scheduling in Telestaff on a Thursday

and Friday afternoon where sick call out volume was high noticing that schedulers had to re-work scheduling on a daily basis during these occurrences.

Currently DFRS allows for leave to be taken in increments of 5 hours up to 24 hours at a time. This allows individuals to call out or take leave for any of these three time slots during their scheduled shift. IA noted that periods less than 12 hours may discourage some from signing up for the overtime position. Personnel do not generally want to sign up for a 5 hour shift when they may need to commute 1 hour each way in order to arrive at the designated station.

Overall all of these above noted factors are having a negative impact on DFRS causing the department to holdover and callback employees out in the field when open positions go unfilled or when no efficient options are available for filling those positions. DFRS does not have a system or policy in place regarding fair spread of holdover and callback time in the field.

## **Observations and Recommendations**

### Observations:

- There are currently a high number of vacancies within the department causing open positions and overtime.
- Limited personnel sign up in Telestaff for overtime coverage.
- The scheduling system currently looks at overtime hours from the first of the year rather than on the 28 day cycle for hiring. A 28 day cycle would allow for schedulers to better understand if there are safety concerns over hours in a shorter time frame.
- After 20 hours of SOT any additional overtime is paid out at FOT.
- Sick time is included in hours which can cause additional overtime hours to increase with actual time off during the 28 day cycle.
- A lot of overtime is a result of specialty positions requiring another individual with the same specialization to fill in.
- Telestaff scheduling rules did not apply efficient means in selecting overtime coverage by considering the best valued employee for a position.
- In the past there were multiple individuals covering scheduling each utilizing their own system and criteria for selecting coverage within the department. There was not a streamlined system in place amongst schedulers in making coverage selection.
- Five hour leave openings cause problems with obtaining coverage based on commute and preference in signing up for overtime.
- Telestaff scheduling went from 21 days in advance to 9 days in advance recently causing concern over personal schedules and this further reduced sign up for overtime in Telestaff.
- Code messaging caused last minute inefficient coverage of overtime positions.
- Currently there is not a fair spread over holdover and callback duties. These duties have never historically been tracked by headquarters.
- Over the past 3 years approximately 10 individuals per year make over 40% of their annual salary in overtime pay. In fiscal year 2013 3 individuals made over 80% of their salary in overtime. Fiscal year 2014 was the first year in a 3 year period where no individuals making over 70% of their annual salary.

### Recommendations:

- To encourage Telestaff overtime sign up, IA recommends that the Department either require staff to sign up for a number of overtime hours per month or quarter or provide incentives for staff to sign up for open positions. The lack of employees signing up for overtime in the system causes FOT pay for the few that do sign up which ends up costing the department much more in the long run. If there was a spread over the staff in the department more SOT would be paid out and less FOT. This recommendation would also decrease the amount of background trading and e-mail position filling requests that appear to be occurring. When personnel try to work out position filling behind the scenes outside of the Telestaff system the system will not work properly to select the most cost effective and efficient personnel for coverage.
- IA recommends providing training and qualification for specialized positions where overtime coverage is short. Adding additional personnel with qualified specialized skill sets will allow for a larger pool of personnel to cover open positions.
- For safety concerns and for the reduction of FOT pay IA recommends that the department ensures that Telestaff is set up to look at overtime in the 28 day cycle. Once this ruling is set up in the system Telestaff will be able to assist the scheduler with more efficient selection for open positions. The limitation of FOT in a 28 day cycle not only alleviates safety concerns for overworked employees but also reduces FOT costs to the Department.
- FOT pay is provided after 20 hours of SOT. IA recommends that the limitation for FOT be no more than 3 or 4 24 hour days per 28 day cycle. 3 full days would be 72 hours of overtime of which 20 hours would be SOT and 52 hours would be paid out in FOT. The limitation of 3 days allows one overtime 24 hour shift per week for 3 weeks with one week of rest with regular shift pay. IA believes this limitation would benefit the department for both safety and efficiency measures.
- IA recommends that formalized procedures are written and put into place for schedulers surrounding the streamline of scheduling practices. IA recommends that these procedures include practices to reduce FOT in the 28 day cycle for safety and efficiency purposes as well as looking at the cost of filling open positions with the most cost effective individual. This may include ensuring that lower rank positions are not filled by higher rank, heavier paid individuals.
- IA recommends that scheduling occur centralized to Department headquarters in order to maintain a streamlined system.
- IA recommends that the Department look at the time slot availability for open positions in the increments between 5 and 12 hours. If the Department believes that providing time off between 5 and 12 hours is in fact an issue and cause of lack of position filling then they should determine if that timeslot should be removed.
- IA recommends that the Department utilize a 14 day scheduling period. This will allow employees the ability to plan for coverage 2 weeks in advance and hopefully provide employees with more leverage and comfort in signing up for overtime positions in Telestaff knowing that they can plan their personal lives around the schedule.
- Code Messaging was a tool utilized to fill open positions in the past. The use of this tool does not allow for timely scheduling or preparation to fill open positions known. IA

recommends that the centralized schedulers be utilized first and when absolutely necessary Code Messaging be utilized.

- With the large number of open positions and lack of overtime sign up there have been more holdovers and callbacks occurring within the department. To create a fair spread of individuals filling in for holdovers and callbacks IA recommends that the Department create a mandatory rotating holdover/callback policy. Having this policy on a rotating basis will allow for fair spread of these additional required hours. When implementing this policy the Department should still remain cognizant over selecting employees who are cost effective from the rotating listing where possible.
- IA recommends that the Department consider utilizing a leave spot system to assist with discretionary leave and provide employees with an understanding of open positions on a daily basis, provided one full month in advance. The utilization of a leave spot system would provide the Department with a particular number of open leave spots per day. The leave spots would first be filled by planned annual leave and then could be picked up on a first come first serve basis on a monthly schedule. This system would help with discretionary leave and would assist employees with planning out their schedules one month in advance.

### **Deliverables**

As a result of this special project IA has provided specific schedules and data to DFRS. Those schedules include the following:

- Fiscal year analysis of overtime for fiscal year 2012, 2013 and 2014 in excel workbooks. Along with a combined analysis of all three fiscal years.

DFRS should seriously consider the recommendations presented by IA noted above, if agreed upon. DFRS may respond to these recommendations separately to IA and the Interagency Internal Audit Authority (IIAA) at its earliest convenience. IA will be available to assist with the review and recommendation in formulating above needed policies and procedures.

The recommendations provided above are presented to assist DFRS in the reduction of overtime costs. Overtime will still exist in the department as long as there are open positions to fill. The addition of the 16 new medics to the department beginning in December 2014 will have the biggest impact in reducing the cost of overtime.

During this analysis and investigation it was a pleasure to work with all of the DFRS personnel and I appreciated their full cooperation and assistance with the support and information required to perform the necessary work. The work performed under this special project was not performed in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards and is considered a non-audit service.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns as it relates to this special project I will be happy to assist in any way that I can.

Pc: Dawn Reed, Administrative Coordinator, Internal Audit  
Michael Grierson, Deputy Chief Logistics, DFRS  
Allen Keyser, Deputy Chief Operations, DFRS  
Bob Baker, Finance Manager, DFRS