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Report of Investigation

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SUBJECT MATTER: Animal Welfare Department's waste of resources

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September 23, 2022
Date of Completion

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October 19, 2022
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DISTRIBUTION:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to City Ordinance 2-17-2, the Inspector General's goals are to (1) Conduct investigations in an efficient, impartial, equitable, and objective manner; (2) Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in city activities including all city contracts and partnerships; (3) Deter criminal activity through independence in fact and appearance, investigation and interdiction; and (4) Propose ways to increase the city's legal, fiscal and ethical accountability to insure that tax payers' dollars are spent in a manner consistent with the highest standards of local governments.

On September 3, 2022, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) received a complaint alleging a waste of city resources in the Animal Welfare Department (AWD). The complainant alleged that a supervisor, tasked with inventorying, ordering, and organizing supplies for the Animal Welfare Department authorized the disposal of brand-new, fully functional cat boxes. The complainant stated that although not certain, the complainant believed the cat boxes were discarded as a result of storage limitations. The OIG determined that the allegations contained elements of potential fraud, waste, or abuse and that it was appropriate for the OIG to conduct a fact-finding investigation. The purpose of the investigation was to determine if there is a waste of City resources at AWD.

As a result of the investigation, the OIG was able to partially substantiate Allegation 1 regarding the waste of city resources at AWD.

ABBREVIATIONS

AWD: Animal Welfare Department
City: City of Albuquerque
E1: AWD Employee
E2: AWD Employee
E3: AWD Employee
E4: AWD Employee
E5: AWD Employee
E6: AWD Employee
E7: AWD Employee
E8: AWD Employee
OIG: Office of Inspector General

INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) is to provide independent and objective insight, oversight, and foresight in promoting integrity, efficiency, overall effectiveness, accountability, and transparency in government to safeguard and preserve public trust.

Complaint

Allegation of waste of city resources in the Animal Welfare Department (AWD). The complainant alleged that a supervisor, tasked with inventorying, ordering, and organizing supplies for AWD, authorized the disposal of brand-new, fully functional cat boxes. The complainant stated that although not certain, the complainant believed the cat boxes were discarded as a result of storage limitations.

Background

The City of Albuquerque announced the closure of the City Warehouse in February 2022 with an effective date of June 30, 2022. The Animal Welfare Department utilized the City Warehouse for purchasing supplies and for the storage of those supplies. On June 30, 2022, when the City Warehouse closed, all product was to be relocated to each department, and any items not claimed by departments was to be put on the surplus list and sold. The Animal Welfare Department had a significant amount of supplies that were to be relocated to their facilities. In June 2022, the Animal Welfare Department received seven (7) pallets of cat boxes, animal food, and other supplies. Most of the items taken to the Eastside Animal Welfare Department were stored in the storage area next to the garage but separate from the facility, some were stored on pallets outside and some were stored in a converted shed on the premises. In August 2022, the Animal Welfare Department ordered Connex storage containers, and the converted shed was razed due to safety issues. The remaining supplies were relocated to the storage area next to the garage but in a separate facility until the Connex storage containers arrived. On September 2, 2022, Animal Welfare Department received the Connex storage containers. On September 3, 2022, an AWD employee tasked with the organization of the supplies assembled a team of employees to clean out the storage areas and organize the remaining supplies. On September 3, 2022, photographs of the

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dumpsters and approximately one hundred (100) discarded cat boxes were taken and a complaint was filed with the OIG.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope: Events at Eastside Animal Shelter Clean up on September 3, 2022

The methodology consisted of:

- Research employee information for those identified
- Send out Notice of Investigations
- Send out Notice of Interviews
- Begin to draft the report
- Develop interview questions for witnesses
- Develop interview questions for Subject
- Conduct interviews
- Contact Legal to see if there is any pending litigation
- Contact Risk Management to see if there is any pending litigation
- Complete report

This report was developed based on information from interviews, inspections, observations, and the OIG's review of selected documentation and records.

INVESTIGATION

Allegation 1: Waste of City resources by discarding cat boxes into dumpsters while cleaning out supplies.

Authority:

301.1 Duty to the Public

The City of Albuquerque is a service institution. In carrying out their assigned duties and responsibilities, employees must always remember their first obligation is to the general public. This obligation must be carried out within the framework of federal, state, and local laws.

301.2 Professional Excellence

Employees are encouraged to strive for personal and professional excellence as a means of keeping current on relevant issues and administering the public's business with professional competence, efficiency, and effectiveness.

301.3 Standards of Conduct

Employees shall in all instances maintain their conduct at the highest personal and professional standards to promote public confidence and trust in the City and public institutions and in a manner that merits the respect and cooperation of co-workers and the community.

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301.9 False Statements/Fraud

No employee shall willfully make any false statement, certificate, mark, rating, or report in regard to any test, certification, appointment, or investigation, or any manner commit any fraud, conceal any wrongdoing or knowingly withhold information about wrongdoing in connection with employment with the City or connection with the work-related conduct of any City employee.

301.11 City Funds

Employees are personally accountable for City money over which they have possession or control. All employees who are in control of City funds must maintain accurate and current records of all such funds. Employees must comply with all policies, practices, and procedures promulgated by the Department of Finance and Administrative Services and approved by the Chief Administrative Officer and in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles regarding the receipt, recording, and disbursement of public monies.

301.12 City Property

Employees are responsible for preventing loss, damage, abuse, misuse, or theft of City property or property entrusted to the City including, but not limited to: artifacts, vehicles, equipment, tools, supplies, and City records. All City property should be used only for City business. City property may not be used for personal gain or profit.

301.13 City Records and Accounting

All City records, including reports, vouchers, requisitions, payroll, and personnel records must be prepared factually and accurately. It is the personal obligation of the employee completing such records as well as the supervisor to ensure that such records are accurate and comply with federal, state, and City record-keeping and accounting requirements.

Evidence: Photographs of the cat boxes in the dumpsters provided by the complainant. Photographs of the storage facilities, and pallets of cat boxes from witnesses. Photographs from the Warehouse on May 5, 2022, before its closing, were taken by OIG staff. Invoices for the purchase of cat boxes. Spreadsheets of Warehouse inventory provided by the Office of Innovation and Performance to the OIG.

Interviews: An interview with E1, who has been with the City since 2008, revealed that AWD stored pallets of cat boxes, received from the Pino Warehouse, outside. The pallets were wrapped in a tarp and stored outside for months. E1 stated that the supplies should have been properly stored. E1 stated that E6, E3, and other employees helped put the boxes in the storage containers. E1 stated that approximately 10-20 boxes were put into the trash. E1 stated that the boxes had roaches running out of them, roach eggs had been deposited on the boxes, and mouse urine and feces had also been identified on the boxes. E1 stated that it would not have been appropriate to send an animal home in the cat boxes because the roaches/roach eggs would have been transported to a customer's home and that mouse urine and feces can carry other diseases. E1 stated that the soiled boxes are a public safety issue and that more cat boxes should have been discarded. E1 stated that E6 decided to discard the soiled cat boxes. E1 stated that there were no other supplies

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discarded. E1 stated that there is a form with a description of the items being disposed of and the reasons for disposal but was not aware if it had been completed for the cat boxes.

An interview with E2, who has been with the City off and on for three years, revealed that E2 was assisting in the organization of plastic cat carriers inside the storage facility, next to the garage but separate from the facility. E2 found a broken plastic cat carrier and was permitted to discard it from E6. E2 stated that there were too many cat boxes and that one of the pallets had to be stored outside. E2 stated that, regardless of where the cat boxes were stored, the AWD staff have to tap out the boxes to get all the cockroaches out before they use them. E2 was not aware of any form to be completed when discarding supplies.

An interview with E3, who has been with the City since 2016, revealed that AWD made a mistake in ordering a few years ago. Instead of ordering cat litter boxes, cat carrying boxes were ordered. Approximately 25,000 were ordered and were being stored at the City Warehouse. In July 2022, AWD ordered new Connex containers to store cat and dog food and other supplies due to the closure of the City Warehouse. The Connex storage containers were delivered on September 2, 2022. On September 3, 2022, E6, E3, E4, E1, E7, and E2 began the process of cleaning and organizing the supplies and putting them into the Connex containers. E3 stated that a few months ago there were about five (5) pallets of cat boxes delivered from the Warehouse. Three (3) pallets were put in the storage area and two (2) pallets were wrapped in a tarp and stored outside. E3 stated the pallets outside were weathered and there were roaches and roach eggs in every stack. Inside there were mouse feces and urine. E3 stated that only the soiled boxes were discarded and they saved what they could. They shook out all the remaining boxes and stored them in the sealed Connex containers. E3 stated that E6 indicated they would have Pest Control spray the remaining boxes for cockroaches. E3 stated that it appears that there are more roaches this year. E3 stated in the past, any boxes soiled with mouse urine or feces were discarded. E3 stated that over 100 cat boxes were put into the trash. E3 stated that more of the boxes should have been thrown out due to research, conducted by E3, regarding the diseases and health issues that can be exacerbated by such contaminants. E3 stated that pest control services need to be provided more frequently, and PPE such as gloves, and respirators should have been provided for the clean-up. E3 was unaware of any required documentation for the disposal of discarded items.

An interview with E4, who has been with the City for five (5) years, revealed that the Connex containers ordered had been received. On September 3, 2022, E6, E3, E4, E1, E7, and E2 began the process of cleaning and organizing the supplies and putting them into the Connex containers. Outside there was a pallet of cat boxes that had water damage, mouse urine and feces, and roaches. E4 stated that two (2) pallets were put in the storage area and two (2) pallets were wrapped in a tarp and stored outside. E4 was not sure who made the decision to store the pallets outside under the tarp but did state that there was no space to store the products that the Warehouse sent over after it closed on June 30, 2022. E4 stated that E6, E3, and E4 decided that it was not safe to keep boxes that were soiled. E4 stated that they broke the seals on bundles, shook out all the boxes, and

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only the soiled boxes were discarded, E6 indicated the staff saved what they could. They shook out all the remaining boxes and stored them in the sealed Connex containers. E4 suggested finding a professional exterminator to treat the boxes. E3 stated that it appears that there are more roaches this year. E3 stated in the past, any boxes soiled with mouse urine or feces were discarded. E4 estimated that sixty-plus (60+) cat boxes were put into the trash. E4 stated that the boxes warranted being thrown out. E4 was unaware of any required documentation for the disposal of discarded items.

An interview with E5, who has been with the City for three (3) years, revealed that there were a lot of cat boxes ordered in error. Some pallets of the cat boxes were stored in the garage and some were stored outside under a tarp. The new Connex containers ordered had been received. On September 3, 2022, E6, E8, E4, and E2 began the process of cleaning and organizing the supplies and putting them into the Connex containers. E5 stated that E5 was not directly involved but was made aware of discarded cat boxes by a fellow handler while E5 was at lunch. The cat boxes were located in the recycling dumpster. E5 stated that the fellow handler did not see anything wrong with the boxes. E5 did see the boxes but did not look closely. E5 did not inquire about the discarded boxes because E5 thought there must be a reason. E5 stated that there have been times when mice and roaches are seen in the blankets, and animal beds. E5 has never seen boxes that were thrown out due to roaches or mice, only boxes that got wet or ruined that could not be used. E5 stated that they don't dispose of anything unless it is broken or unable to be used. E5 was unaware of any required documentation for the disposal of discarded items.

An interview with E6, who has been with the City since 2006, revealed that AWD had a storage area that was not secure or sealed. AWD ordered some airtight Connex storage containers to replace the car wash converted shed that was torn down two months ago. E6 stated that AWD staff received one (1) week's notice that the old shed was going to be razed. E6 stated that an AWD supervisor inadvertently used the product number of cat litter boxes instead of cat-carrying boxes, resulting in 25,000 cat-carrying boxes being ordered and an excess of supplies. E6 stated that a few months ago there were seven (7) pallets of cat boxes delivered from the Warehouse and that all of the pallets could not fit into storage. Four (4) pallets were put in the storage area and three (3) pallets were wrapped in a tarp and stored outside. E6 stated that there are thirteen (13) additional pallets stored at the Pino Warehouse. E6 stated that AWD is requesting an extension on the time allotted to take the supplies out of the Warehouse.

The Connex storage containers were delivered on September 2, 2022. On September 3, 2022, E6, E3, E4, E8, and E2 began the process of cleaning and organizing the supplies and putting them into the Connex containers. E6 stated the pallets outside were infested with roaches and mice. E6 directed E3, E4, and E1 to discard the damaged boxes. E6 stated that they looked through the boxes to determine a disposal status. Any boxes with mice urine or feces, roaches, or water damage were discarded, and they saved all remaining boxes after shaking out all the roaches. E6's opinion was that the soiled cat boxes warranted discarding and that she believes that using contaminated

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boxes poses a risk to the animals. E6 stated that each staff made their own choice to wear PPE during the clean-up. E6 stated that a pest control company services the facility weekly. E6 indicated that there is a rodent and pest problem at the facility. E6 stated that the roaches seemed to like the humidity. E6 stated that AWD is addressing the rodent and pest problem. E6 guessed that four (4) bundles of fifteen (15) boxes were disposed of. E6 stated that there are no forms to be completed for disposals. E6 stated that the Director was aware of the clean-up.

Analysis: The OIG reviewed purchase orders, the inventory reconciliation, and photos, taken by OIG, of the excess cat boxes located at the City Warehouse. These documents and photos provided evidence that there was an excess of cat boxes ordered that required storage. With the closing of the Warehouse, some of the supplies were relocated to AWD where there was insufficient storage facilities.

The OIG reviewed the photographs of the cat boxes in the dumpsters and requested witnesses E6, E3, and E4 to circle and identify areas of mouse urine or feces, cockroaches, or water damage. The OIG's review of the marked photos revealed contamination of the boxes in the dumpster.

The OIG also reviewed photographs provided by the witnesses of the storage areas and the pallets before the clean-up indicating evidence of rodents, pests, and water damage.

The OIG conducted internet research on cockroaches which revealed that cockroaches are attracted to cardboard. Wet cardboard emits a scent that cockroaches pick up, and it keeps them hydrated. Cockroaches will lay their eggs in cardboard boxes as it is a source of food and hydration. Pest control companies recommend cardboard boxes be maintained outside or taken to recycling. Taking contaminated boxes into a home could result in an infestation.

A review of the research regarding mouse urine, droppings, dead rodents, and nesting materials revealed that it is important to maintain clean areas due to the spread of rodent-borne diseases. Special precautions for heavy rodent infestation require coveralls, rubber boots or disposable shoe covers, rubber, latex, or vinyl gloves, protective goggles, and an appropriate respiratory protection device as mice can carry leptospirosis bacteria that can infect humans and pets.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), cockroaches carry bacteria that, if deposited on food, can cause salmonella, staphylococcus, and streptococcus. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), cockroaches have been known to play a role as carriers of intestinal diseases, such as dysentery, diarrhea, cholera, and typhoid fever. Additionally, cockroaches are one of the most common sources of indoor allergens and children are more susceptible to cockroach allergies than adults.

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The research reviewed supports that the best course of action was to dispose of the contaminated cat boxes to ensure that AWD was not inadvertently creating a public safety issue for those adopting cats.

Finding regarding Allegation 1: The OIG was able to partially substantiate the allegation. The OIG found that the root cause of the alleged waste was due to an overorder of supplies, inadequate storage space, the closure of the City Warehouse, and the razing of the old storage shed before receiving the newly ordered Connex storage units. These factors resulted in excess cat boxes being stored outside under tarps where the boxes were infested with rodents and cockroaches and received water damage. Approximately one hundred (100) of these boxes were ultimately discarded due to damage. The OIG found that the cat boxes discarded did warrant being discarded as they were soiled with rodent urine and feces. Additionally, all of the cat boxes stored outside on pallets were infested with cockroaches. The AWD staff assigned to the clean-up went through the pallet of cat boxes, shaking out the cockroaches and identifying those that were too soiled to be used in operations. All cat boxes, with no evidence of rodent urine, feces, or cockroach eggs, were maintained and secured in sealed bins.

Recommendation: AWD should safeguard its inventory in a secure location, appropriately treated or free from rodents and other pests, to ensure the integrity of the supplies is maintained thus mitigating the potential waste of City resources. The OIG recommends AWD request that any excess supplies be permitted to be stored at the Pino Warehouse facility. The OIG recommends management review of purchases to ensure the items and quantities ordered are consistent with AWD needs. AWD create a “Disposition form” to be completed every time supplies, equipment, or other assets are disposed of. To ensure proper controls over city assets/inventory, the form should include the name of the supply/equipment to be disposed of, the date, the employee’s name, supervisor approval, and the reason for disposition. As a part of this recommendation, the OIG suggests that staff be trained to maintain clean spaces and that reminders of their responsibility for clean work spaces be posted. AWD may also consider creating a task assigned to a rotating slate of employees where the employee is responsible to ensure the facilities are being adequately cleaned up. This can be acknowledged through a daily sign-off sheet by the assigned employee for accountability purposes. Furthermore, the OIG recommends PPE such as gloves, goggles, jumpsuits, booties, and appropriate respirators should be provided to all staff to clean out areas contaminated with rodent urine, feces, and other pests.

Management’s response: AWD agrees that inventory items should be safeguarded and stored properly. To this end, storage areas were recently upgraded to sealed shipping (connex) containers. These storage areas keep supplies away from pests and weather. AWD agrees that a “disposition form” should be utilized when items are disposed of. AWD will develop a form and implement its use. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) items are readily available to all staff, at all times. Lastly, while the department tries very hard to safeguard all COA assets, sometimes items get soiled and must be discarded. The cost of the soiled boxes in this case was \$1.98 each. AWD will

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assign the Deputy director to approve all bulk supply purchases for East and West Shelters when a requisition is created to ensure quantities ordered are consistent with AWD needs and storage options.