



Media Advisory

JULY 18, 2026

St. Lucie County Fire District Official Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ST. LUCIE COUNTY, FL – Following recent public inquiries and one-sided local media reporting, the St. Lucie County Fire District is releasing the definitive record of facts surrounding recent personnel reassignments, workplace misconduct investigations, and subsequent disciplinary determinations. The purpose of this disclosure is to ensure public clarity, protect employee safety, and uphold the integrity of District operations.

In March 2026, on the heels of a highly publicized, severe hazing incident in a neighboring Florida county, Fire District Administration first received multiple video recordings depicting severe workplace misconduct inside a District facility. The clear video and photographic evidence revealed that senior personnel had engineered a custom-modified electrical shocking device, constructed from a dismantled bug zapper, to intentionally administer painful electrical shocks to subordinate personnel on duty. Independent testimonial reviews confirmed these filmed events physically took place during shifts in March and September of 2024.

This discovery followed a separate administrative history at the facility. In 2025, multiple personnel, including three of the recently disciplined senior employees, were named in a large-scale workplace harassment and bullying complaint. Because that initial investigation could not legally substantiate the specific allegations due to a lack of on-the-record testimony, no disciplinary action was rendered against any employee. Instead, the District utilized its management rights to implement non-disciplinary, operational reassignments, separating the station's crews purely to ensure a positive workplace environment.

Following those operational crew transfers, the individuals involved leveled extensive administrative criticism and accusations of wrongdoing against Fire Chief Jeff Lee and District Attorney Kim Sabol. Those complaints were closed internally and subsequently outsourced to an outside firm for an independent review.

When the hidden 2024 video recordings finally came to light in March 2026, Fire District Administration recognized the extreme safety breaches in the footage. Acutely aware of the ongoing administrative attacks from the specific individuals captured on camera, Fire Chief Jeff Lee took immediate steps to insulate the process from any perception of internal bias or administrative retaliation. To completely eliminate any conflict (actual or perceived), the Fire District bypassed standard internal

channels and fully outsourced the video review and subsequent investigation to an independent outside counsel, Attorney J.K. Keller of Allen, Norton & Blue, P.A.

Upon evaluating the physical evidence, Mr. Keller recommended that the Fire District report the matter to law enforcement, the Florida Department of Health, and initiate a formal administrative investigation. To ensure absolute fairness throughout the disciplinary process, Mr. Keller was retained to independently evaluate the sustained findings and recommend the appropriate level of corrective action.

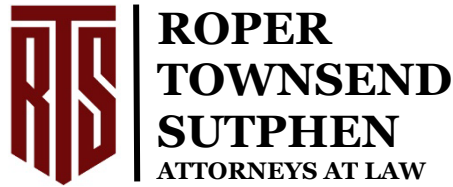
Following a comprehensive investigation, the independent investigator concluded by a preponderance of the evidence that employees operating either on probation or in an apprentice capacity were subjected to hazing by senior personnel and supervisors. Based strictly upon the independent investigator's sustained findings and disciplinary recommendations, the District took action to terminate three employees and suspend two others.

The accompanying public release of the July 2025 Susan Gainey Workplace Culture Analysis and the 2026 J.K. Keller Investigative Summary establishes a clear, retrospective record. While the physical actions detailed in the Keller report occurred secretly during 2024, Attorney Gainey's independent assessment in 2025 accurately diagnosed the underlying environmental vulnerabilities at the facility. Notably, Ms. Gainey described "an environment characterized by intense peer pressure [and] social exclusion..." as well as "light hazing... that blurs the line between camaraderie and misconduct..." Ms. Gainey's investigation acknowledged that "[w]hile these dynamics may be rationalized by some tradition or unit cohesion, they appear to have created a barrier to inclusion... At least one firefighter described being miserable..." The video and testimonial evidence elicited during Mr. Keller's investigation elucidates Ms. Gainey's concerns.

Because these 2024 physical incidents were actively concealed from administration and entirely unknown until March 2026, their discovery initiated a distinct, independent disciplinary review. The District's recent actions mark the first and only disciplinary measures ever rendered regarding these specific offenses.

The Fire District's paramount mission is public safety and the protection of its personnel. The extreme liability, safety breaches, and disregard for zero-tolerance department regulations introduced by these actions cannot and will not be tolerated. As the disciplined individuals have since exercised their rights to initiate the formal contractual grievance and arbitration process, the District will confidently present these documented facts within that legal forum and will have no further public comment at this time.

JEFFREY L. ASHTON
JENNIFER C. BARRON
DAVID A. BELFORD
DAVID B. BLESSING
JEFFREY A. CARTER
SUSAN G. GAINES
DAVID R. JADON
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Local Government

July 29, 2025

VIA E-MAIL

Fire Chief Jeff Lee
Assistant Fire Chief Brian Gonzalez
Attorney Kim Sabol
St. Lucie Fire District
5160 NW Milner Drive
Port St. Lucie, FL 34983

Re: St. Lucie Cnty Fire Dist.
Our File No.: 061-020

Dear Chief Lee, Assistant Chief Gonzalez, and Ms. Sabol:

It was a pleasure working with the dedicated team at the St. Lucie County Fire District. In total, I had the opportunity to speak with over 30 employees during two full days of investigations into recent allegations against the Fire District.

I am writing to formally highlight and summarize ongoing concerns regarding the workplace culture at Station 1A. Recent investigations into allegations raised by firefighters, as well as supporting witness testimony, have identified persistent concerns about the workplace culture at Station 1A. While no policy violations or substantiated harassment claims were found, multiple witnesses independently described Station 1A as an environment characterized by intense peer pressure, social exclusion, and inappropriate banter. These conditions have impacted team dynamics, recruitment, and morale.

Throughout the investigation, Station 1A was repeatedly described as an intense, high-pressure environment with crew members who like to bid together and stay together. While these traits can be strengths in a high-performing fire service unit, they have also reportedly contributed to perceptions of exclusion, emotional distress, and discomfort—particularly among newer or less socially integrated personnel.

1A appears to have a culture that is generally perceived as unfavorable to many employees and even some community members. Witnesses, including current and former 1A members, described behaviors such as:

- Overly aggressive banter, mockery, sarcasm, and personal questioning unrelated to job performance, including 1A firefighters asking recruits in front of a group about drug usage.
- Mocking or public correction of apprentices, which some described as humiliating or going “overboard.”
- “Light hazing,” “playing jokes,” or “horseplay” that blurs the line between camaraderie and misconduct. One employee noted that such behavior would not be accepted at other stations.
- A sentiment among multiple firefighters that certain individuals were “not welcome” unless conforming to unspoken social norms.
- An environment that is “cliquish” such that new employees or employees on short-term assignments do not feel part of the team and may feel isolated.
- More than one employee stated that 1A is composed of “cowboys” who “do their own thing.” One employee stated that he was told by someone from 1A that they “did things their way, not the department way,” suggesting that they do not follow District policies and procedures.
- Multiple employees stated that the workplace culture at 1A was not inclusive.
- Firefighters had requested transfers or expressed discomfort due to the 1A environment.
- One firefighter stated that the environment at 1A “made it tough to come to work.”
- Loyalty among existing crew members can result in the informal exclusion of newcomers.
- One firefighter reported there appeared to be favoritism or bias in advancement at 1A.

While these dynamics may be rationalized by some as tradition or unit cohesion, they appear to have created a barrier to inclusion and professional growth for others. At least one firefighter described being **miserable** and considering leaving the district due to the culture at 1A, and others reported **actively avoiding bidding into that station**. Such patterns, even in the absence of formal policy violations, are indicative of an environment that may not align with the district’s values of professionalism, respect, and mutual support. The reputation of 1A may have harmed the Fire District’s reputation in the community, as potential candidates reportedly failed to apply to the Fire District because of the reputation of 1A.

It is my opinion that operational needs require changes at 1A in order to ensure high standards for services offered to the public, and promote goodwill and a favorable attitude of the public and all employees toward the Fire District. In order to maintain the high standard of the Fire District as a whole and best serve the entire District, I respectfully recommend the following actions:

1. **Personnel Reassignment** - Reassign personnel from Station 1A in order to disrupt entrenched cultural dynamics and reestablish a balanced, inclusive station environment. This adjustment to the work environment is essential because maintaining the current status quo will be detrimental to the best interest of the Fire District as a whole and may subject the Fire District to future complaints regarding the workplace culture at 1A.
2. **Supervisor Counseling and Development at 1A** – require current and recent 1A supervisory officers to meet with Fire District leadership regarding improving the workplace culture at 1A.
3. **Officer Training** – continuing officer training district-wide, including training on how to navigate high-performance culture without fostering exclusion; conflict de-escalation and managing personal boundaries; inclusive leadership and mentoring multigenerational teams.
4. **Mandatory Refresher Training for All Employees** – reinforce expectations for appropriate humor and language, as well as respectful interpersonal communication.

I recommend implementation begin immediately to signal leadership commitment and to provide support to all personnel within the Fire District. The goal of these recommendations is not punitive but restorative: to maintain the operational excellence of Station 1A while ensuring its culture aligns with the Fire District's values of professionalism, inclusion, and mutual respect. The objective is not to dilute the high standards that Station 1A is known for, but to ensure those standards are achieved through a culture of support, not exclusion. A great team environment should inspire accountability without alienation.

In conclusion, the recommendations outlined above are designed to address the concerns raised, foster a more inclusive and respectful workplace culture, and ensure accountability at all levels of the department. By implementing targeted personnel changes, enhancing leadership training, and reinforcing standards of conduct, the Fire District can take meaningful steps toward improving morale, preventing future issues, and upholding the integrity of its operations. Continued monitoring and follow-up will be essential to ensure these efforts result in lasting and positive change.

Fire Chief Jeff Lee
July 29, 2025
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Thank you for your continued leadership in fostering excellence across the Fire District. Please advise if further documentation, assistance or coordination is needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Susan G. Gainey", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Susan G. Gainey
sgainey@roperpa.com
407-470-1468

TO: Fire Chief Jeff Lee

FROM: John “J.K.” W. Keller, Iv., Esq.
Allen, Norton, & Blue, P.A.

RE: Investigative Summary and Report

Date: May 15, 2026

I. BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION

On or about March 12, 2026, Firefighter/Paramedic Roberto “Rocky” Tapia disclosed video and photographic evidence to Assistant Chief Brian Gonzalez that seemed to depict hazing, workplace violence, and/or other inappropriate workplace behavior. Each video is briefly summarized as follows:

- VIDEO-2026-3-11-22-26-53¹ (“Video 1”): This video depicts two unidentified District employees sitting in chairs in front of the Station’s garage as two unidentified District employees dump 5 gallon buckets of water on their heads from the roof. It is unknown who recorded this video or on what date the video was recorded.
- VIDEO-2026-3-11-22-26-32 (“Video 2”): This video depicts an unidentified District employee opening a fire truck in the Station garage. As he does so, what appears to be a dead racoon falls out of the fire truck. It is unknown who recorded the video or on what date the video was recorded.
- VIDEO-2026-03-11-20-35-26 ² (“Video 3”): This video depicts then Paramedic Apprentice/Probationary District employee (now Firefighter/Paramedic) Matthew Lohse sitting in a chair by himself in the driveway of Station 1. He is wearing a District uniform and is answering questions being asked by the following District employees seated in a semi-circle facing Lohse: FF/PM Jordon Hutchison, FF/PM Christopher Baldwin, FF/PM Douglas Boudrias, and FF/PM Kayla Gammie. There is a black device laying on his right thigh with wires that run to another device located against his left thigh. According to both a photographic timestamp (PHOTO-2026-03-11-21-30-21.jpg) and sworn testimony obtained during this investigation, this video was recorded on March 22, 2024.
- VIDEO-2026-03-11-20-35-46 ² (“Video 4”): This video appears to be a continuation from Video 3. Lohse is seated in the same chair and is holding the black device, which was later identified as a bug zapper that had been modified to

¹ The titles of each of these videos do not reflect the date the video was taken. Where the date that the video was recorded is known, it is identified. If no date is identified, the date of the recording is unknown.

“shock”² people (hereinafter the “Device”). In this video, a black cord with two metal tips can be seen protruding from the Device, and those tips initially make contact with Lohse’s left thigh. A shock is administered and Lohse seems to yell, “Oh fuck!”, rubs his thigh, and then says “Damn!” Voices from Hutchison, Baldwin, Boudrias, and/or Gammie can be heard asking questions and discussing the answers, as well as seemingly laughing at Lohse’s apparent pain from the shock. Lohse later says, “I’m going back to the arm, dude; fuck the leg” as he moves the Device’s metal tips from his thigh to his arm. According to both a photographic timestamp (PHOTO-2026-03-11-21-30-21 2.jpg) and sworn testimony obtained during this investigation, this video was recorded on March 22, 2024.

- VIDEO-2026-03-11-20-36-08 2 (“Video 5”): This video depicts then Paramedic Apprentice District employee (now Firefighter/Paramedic) Kyle Kirkham standing in what appears to be the Station garage holding his hand on a table as another individual applies the Device’s metal tips to Kirkham’s left arm. Each time a shock is applied, Kirkham yells “Ah!” in apparent pain while his hand lifts up and at times twitches, seemingly in response to the electrical stimulation. An off-camera voice (identified as Baldwin’s during sworn witness interviews) comments, “Let me give him the bridge,” to which Kirkham responds, “I don’t want to cross no bridge.” Approximately 3 more shocks of varying duration are administered before Kirkham pulls his arm away, seemingly in pain. According to both a photographic timestamp (PHOTO-2026-03-11-21-30-20.jpg) and sworn testimony obtained during this investigation, this video was recorded on September 6, 2024.
- VIDEO-2026-03-11-20-36-08 3 (“Video 6”): This video depicts then Probationary District employee (now Firefighter/Paramedic) John Edmondson sitting at what appears to be the same table that Kirkham was standing at in Video 5. Edmondson is laying his hand on the table as Hutchison holds the Device and places the Device’s metal tips to Edmondson’s left hand. An off-camera voice (identified as Tapia’s during sworn witness interviews) is heard saying, “Don’t bitch up, John! Don’t bitch up!” Edmondson is shocked with the device several times and each time, he is heard groaning and his face is observed contorting. A final shock is administered and Edmondson seemingly yells out, “Ah!” and pulls his hand away. According to both a photographic timestamp (PHOTO-2026-03-11-21-30-20 2.jpg) and sworn testimony obtained during this investigation, this video was recorded on September 6, 2024.

Asst. Chief Gonzalez made Chief Jeff Lee aware of these videos, who subsequently initiated an investigation as the Complainant. Chief Lee and the St. Lucie County Fire District (“SLCFD”) retained the undersigned and the law firm of Allen, Norton, & Blue, P.A. to investigate these allegations against Firefighters Tapia, Boudrias, Baldwin, Hutchison, and Gammie.

² The term “shock,” as used in this Report, is intended to describe an electrical current, stimulation, or zap administered by this modified Device. Because the Device was originally intended to kill bugs and not shock people, and because the Device was modified from its original form in order to shock people, several different terms can probably fairly describe the force exerted by the device. So, the term “shock” is used in this Report for ease of reference.

II. INVESTIGATION BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURE

With the assistance of St. Lucie County Fire District's ("SLCFD") administrative team, the undersigned received and reviewed the following documentation:

- Videos and photographs identified in Section I of this Report;
- March 22, 2024, Station 1 Roster;
- September 6, 2024, Station 1 Roster;
- 2023 – 2026 Collective Bargaining Agreement between the St. Lucie County Fire District and the Professional Firefighters and Paramedics of St. Lucie County, Local 1377, International Association of Firefighters; and,
- SLCFD Rules and Regulations, Revised December 2022.

Additionally, the undersigned interviewed the following individuals:

- Roberto "Rocky" Tapia
- John Edmondson
- Matthew Lohse
- Kyle Kirkham
- Logan Herl
- Jonathan Blanchard
- Douglas Boudrias
- Brian Fogal
- Alejandro Echeverri
- Kayla Gammie
- Jordon Hutchison
- Christopher Baldwin

SLCFD placed no restrictions on any interviews in terms of the scope of questioning or time allotted for each interview. No person was restricted from being interviewed. The findings in this investigative report are based on a preponderance of the evidence standard. Under this standard, allegations are found to be substantiated only where, after considering all evidentiary support that was provided, including the relative credibility of the witnesses and statements during the interviews, it is determined that the conduct at issue more likely than not constituted a violation of SLCFD Rules and Regulations, SLCFD policy, or applicable law.

Ultimately, this investigation was limited to potential violations of SLCFD policy or applicable law related to the conduct that occurred on or about March 22, 2024 and September 6, 2024, as depicted in Videos 3 – 6. No policy violations related to Videos 1 and 2 were considered due to the lack of information available concerning these videos. More specifically, while witnesses interviewed were questioned about these videos, the potential perpetrators, the potential victims, the origin of each video recording, and the date of each video are all unknown with respect to Videos 1 and 2. Consequently, there was insufficient information to investigate the incidents depicted in either of these videos for potential violations of District policy or law.

While this report may not directly address every factual allegation made throughout the course of the investigation, all allegations have been considered and are either addressed specifically herein, or they have been determined to be immaterial to the ultimate question of whether Firefighters/Paramedics Tapia, Boudrias, Baldwin, Hutchison, and/or Gammie violated SLCFD's Rules and Regulations or law.

III. INVESTIGATION

Interview of Roberto “Rocky” Tapia:

Firefighter Roberto “Rocky” Tapia was interviewed first since he disclosed the videos to Asst. Chief Gonzalez. As with nearly every other interview of District employees conducted in this investigation, Tapia was hesitant to inculcate any fellow firefighters and even reluctant to discuss his reasoning for disclosing the videos. Ultimately, Tapia said his motivation for disclosing the videos was a feeling that the behavior had gone “too far.” Tapia testified (as did other witnesses) that the behavior evidenced in the March and September 2024 videos was never reported prior to Tapia disclosing the videos in March 2026.

Tapia filmed Videos 3 – 6. As it relates to Videos 3 and 4, Tapia testified that Lohse was placed in the chair, asked questions by Baldwin, Boudrias and/or Hutchison, and shocked by the Device if he got the questions wrong. However, Tapia claimed ignorance as to whose idea it was to place Lohse, then a Paramedic Apprentice (i.e., he was not cleared to act as a Paramedic on his own yet), in a chair and quiz him under these conditions.

As for Videos 5 – 6, Tapia claims both Kirkham and Edmondson were willing participants who actually wanted to be shocked by the device and even competed with each other to see who could be shocked for longer. At the same time, Tapia claimed he did not know whose idea it was to use the device on Probationary Firefighters Kirkham and Edmondson, nor did he know whether there was a suggestion or order to Kirkham or Edmondson to be shocked by the device notwithstanding their consent. Tapia did, however, concede that he instructed Edmondson not to “bitch up” in Video 6.

Interviews of Lohse, Edmondson, and Kirkham:

Lohse, Edmonson, and Kirkham were all subjected to being shocked (as depicted in Videos 3 – 6 described in Section I) by the Device during their first year of employment (*i.e.*, during their probationary period) with the District. All three were reluctant, if not resistant, to provide a candid and forthcoming statement regarding how the Device was used on them and the involvement of Tapias, Hutchison, Baldwin, Boudrias, and Gammie. Additionally, all three insisted they consented to being shocked notwithstanding any actual or perceived power disparity given their junior status at the time. Nevertheless, after watching the videos and considering the circumstances in hindsight, all three agreed the conduct violated District policies.

Lohse

Firefighter/Paramedic Matthew Lohse began working for the District in June 2023. Accordingly, he had been employed by the District less than one (1) year and was a probationary employee/Paramedic Apprentice at the time he was interrogated while being shocked by the Device in March 2024.

According to Lohse, on or about March 22, 2024, he learned that he did not succeed in completing his paramedic apprenticeship and would have to try again. Hutchison, Baldwin, and/or Boudrias came up with the idea of connecting Lohse to the Device, asking him paramedic questions, and shocking him when he got an answer wrong. Hutchison, Baldwin, Boudrias, and Gammie are all seen in Videos 3 and 4 sitting in a half circle around Lohse, questioning him, and laughing when he was shocked.

Lohse's recollection is that the Device belonged to Hutchison, who modified the Device to be used on people. There were several variations of the modified Device, but his recollection is that the final version was created with the help of an unidentified EMT student that had prior electrician experience.

When confronted with the policy violations described in Section IV below, Lohse agreed that the aforementioned conduct violated these policies.

Edmondson

Firefighter/Paramedic John Edmondson testified that he was hired in November 2023 and began working for the District in December 2023. Thus, Edmondson was still a probationary employee at the time he was shocked by the Device in September 2024. Edmondson's recollection is that Hutchison and Baldwin made the suggestion for Edmondson and Kirkham to get shocked by the Device while they were all eating dinner at the Station. Edmondson insisted that he consented to being shocked and that he wanted to see how long he could withstand the shock. However, he struggled to explain why Tapia is telling him, "Don't bitch up!" while he is being shocked or why it was only the junior employees being subjected to this treatment. Nevertheless, Edmondson did agree that the aforementioned conduct violated the District's policies.

Kirkham

Firefighter/Paramedic Kyle Kirkham began working for the District in June 2023 and was thus still in his Paramedic Apprentice at the time he was shocked in September 2024. He came across as very reluctant to discuss being shocked by the Device and claimed he did not remember many of the circumstances surrounding being shocked. Indeed, he claimed he did not remember who shocked him³ or whose idea it was to use the device on District employees. However,

³ Only a small portion (and not the face) of the person shocking Kirkham is visible in the video. However, this occurred at the same location in the Station as Edmondson being shocked by Hutchison, and it appears to be Hutchison's arm that is holding the Device against Kirkham.

Kirkham did agree that using the Device on District employees violated the District's policies and further testified that if he saw similar conduct occurring today, he would stop it.

Interviews of Herl, Blanchard, Fogal, and Echeverri:

Firefighters/Paramedics Logan Herl, Jonathan Blanchard, Brian Fogal, and Alejandro Echeverri were all interviewed as potential witnesses to Lohse, Kirkham and/or Edmondson being shocked by the Device.

Herl

Firefighter/Paramedic Logan Herl began working for the District in 2021. He saw the Device used on Edmondson and Kirkham, and testified that both consented to being shocked. Notably, Herl did not see anyone other than Hutchison use the Device on other employees that day. After watching the videos, Herl said that he would "probably not" use the Device on any other District employees. Herl also agreed that using the Device on fellow District employees violated the District's policies identified in Section IV below.

Blanchard

Firefighter/Paramedic Jonathan Blanchard began working for the district in June 2023. Blanchard was present when Lohse was shocked by the device in March 2024. Like Lohse, Blanchard was also still in his probationary period at the time. Hutchison, Baldwin, and/or Boudrias suggested that he (Blanchard) get shocked by the Device, so he was shocked once after agreeing to same. Blanchard also recalled Lohse being connected to the device, quizzed, and shocked when he gave wrong answers. Blanchard initially appeared to try very hard to protect Hutchison, Baldwin, Boudrias, Tapia, and Gammie, but after viewing Videos 3 – 6 and recognizing that it was only probationary employees being shocked, Blanchard ultimately agreed that this was not proper conduct and violated the District's policies identified in Section IV below.

Fogal

Firefighter/Paramedic Brian Fogal has been employed by the District for over 25 years. He was present when Kirkham and Edmondson were being shocked by the Device in September 2024. Fogal does not remember who or if anyone suggested or ordered that Kirkham and Edmondson get shocked, but Fogal insists it was consensual. When confronted with the District's policies referenced in Section IV and considering the circumstances in hindsight, Fogal generally agreed that shocking employees with the Device violated the District's policies. Fogal also seemed to agree that he would stop this conduct if he were to witness it now.

Echeverri

Firefighter/Paramedic Alejandro Echeverri started working for the District in November 2023. Echeverri was on-shift and present at the Station when Lohse was shocked by the Device in March 2024, but did not personally witness Lohse or anyone else being shocked by the Device. After watching the videos of Lohse, Edmondson, and Kirkham being shocked by the Device,

Echeverri testified that this was not proper conduct and if he witnessed it, he would report it. Echeverri further agreed that this conduct violated the District's policies identified in Section IV below.

Interview of Gammie:

Firefighter/Paramedic Kayla Gammie began working for the District in 2021. Although she initially claimed to have no recollection of employees being shocked by the Device, her recollection was purportedly refreshed after watching the videos. Gammie ultimately conceded that she should not have participated in questioning Lohse as depicted in Videos 3 – 4, and that she should have stopped the incident. Gammie further conceded that this behavior violated the District's policies.

Interviews of Boudrias, Baldwin, and Hutchison:

Firefighter/Paramedic Douglas Boudrias began working for the District in January 2018. Boudrias was present and working in a supervisory capacity for the Lohse incident, but not for the Kirkham and Edmondson incidents. He did not dispute that he, Hutchison, and/or Baldwin came up with the idea to place Lohse in the chair and question him as depicted in the video. Boudrias commented multiple times that the incident appeared inappropriate "as you're portraying it now," but when asked to explain why he disagreed with how the incident was being portrayed, Boudrias only disputed the description of the Device as being some sort of taser. Boudrias admitted that his conduct violated the District's General Prohibitions but denied that he violated any Group III Offenses.

Firefighter/Paramedic Jordon Hutchison began working for the District in 2015 and Firefighter/Paramedic Christopher Baldwin began working for the District in 2020. Baldwin and Hutchison both denied any wrongdoing and relied on the purported "consent" from Lohse, Edmondson, and Kirkham to getting shocked. They commented that their behavior was not inconsistent with how they were treated as rookies at the District.

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The undersigned fully acknowledges the testimony of the majority of the witnesses that Lohse, Kirkham, and Edmondson all purportedly "consented" to being shocked by the Device. Yet, the undersigned would also be remiss if he did not also acknowledge that:

- All of the videos of the Device being used occurred while the involved employees were on-duty;
- The videos reflect the Device's usage only on the most junior District employees (i.e., probationary and/or paramedic apprentice employees) at Station 1 at the time the videos were filmed;
- There is no evidence that any senior members were placed in a chair, questioned, and then shocked if they got the question wrong;

- Hutchison, Baldwin, and Boudrias were acting supervisors at various points when they subjected junior District employees to the Device;
- Lohse, Edmondson, and Kirkham were all probationary or apprentice members at the time the Device was used on them;
- There was a power disparity between the perpetrators (Hutchison, Baldwin, Boudrias, Tapia and Gammie – all senior employees and/or acting supervisors) and the victims (Lohse, Edmondson, and Kirkham – all probationary or apprentice employees);
- Although many witnesses testified that the shock from the Device was not necessarily painful, the videos belie this claim: for example, Lohse yells “Oh fuck!” after being shocked, and Kirkham yells “Ah!” after being shocked and his hand is seen twitching in response to the shock;
- Each District employee interviewed with the exception of Hutchison, Baldwin and Kirkham agreed this behavior was inappropriate and, in many cases, they agreed that the policies described below were violated by this behavior;
- Many of the District employees interviewed testified that if they were to see this behavior today, they would stop it and/or report it up the chain of command;
- Hutchison testified that this was an effort to toughen up and build character in rookies; and,
- Even disregarding the circumstances and power disparity, and assuming it is true that Lohse, Edmondson, and Kirkham were truly voluntary participants, these actions still violated SLCFD policy.

SLCFD’s Rules and Regulations, in relevant part, mandate the following:

3.11 General Prohibitions

- A. Employees are expected to be aware that they are public service employees and to conduct themselves in a manner that will, in no way, discredit the Fire District, public officials, fellow employees or themselves...
- B. Employees shall avoid conduct or speech that is contrary to good order and discipline. They shall treat each other with utmost courtesy and respect and at all times refrain from making any derogatory remarks concerning others...

Conclusion

The undersigned finds a preponderance of the evidence that Tapia, Gammie, Boudrias, Baldwin, and Hutchison all violated 3.11(A) and (B)⁴. As described above, many of the witnesses interviewed agreed their behavior violated both of these subsections. Regardless of these acknowledgements, the totality of the conduct establishes, at minimum, a perception of a culture of hazing⁵ by senior District employees against junior/probationary District employees, which certainly brings discredit to the District, to fellow employees, and to themselves. Further, it is axiomatic that this same conduct is a failure to “treat each other with utmost courtesy and respect” as required by subsection B.

It is also notable that while many witnesses claimed that Hutchison, Baldwin, Boudrias, and Gammie were all shocked by the device at some point in time, none of the witnesses interviewed could provide any photographic or video evidence of these senior employees being shocked by the device. Further, none of these individuals were placed in a chair, questioned, and shocked for wrong answers. There was also no evidence presented that any of these senior employees were subjected to continuous “shocking” like Edmondson and Kirkham; rather, they vaguely testified that they used the device on themselves or they may have been subjected to a surprise shock by an unidentified user of the Device.⁶

11.02 Group III Offenses⁷ Nos. 9 and 22:

9. Unlawful or improper conduct, either on or off duty, which would tend to adversely affect the employee’s relationship to the job, fellow workers, reputation or goodwill in the community.

22. Violation of the District’s Workplace Violence⁸ Policy⁹ as Described in these Rules and Regulations.

Conclusion

⁴ “Violation of any Fire District Policy and/or requirements as set forth in the Rules and Regulations” constitutes a Group II Offense, punishable by up to 48 hours suspension for the first offense, and up to termination for a second offense.

⁵ The undersigned relied on the hazing definition set forth in Fla. Stat. § 1006.63(1), which provides “the term ‘hazing’ means any action or situation that recklessly or intentionally endangers the mental or physical health or safety of a student... for purposes including, but not limited to: (a) Initiation into any organization... (d) The perpetuation or furtherance of a tradition or ritual of any organization...” While this statute applies to hazing in an educational setting, the undersigned nevertheless finds the definition instructive for purposes of this investigation.

⁶ For example, Gammie testified that someone came up behind her and shocked her on the arm once by an unidentified user of the Device, and Tapia testified that an unidentified person shocked him in the back with the device once.

⁷ Group III Offenses are punishable by discipline up to and including discharge/termination for a first offense.

⁸ The term “violence” is not defined in the Rules and Regulations. Accordingly, the undersigned relied on the Merriam-Webster’s definition which, in relevant part, defines violence as “the use of physical force so as to... abuse...”

⁹ The Workplace Violence Policy (16.03) provides, “Violence, or the threat of violence, has no place in any of the Fire District’s work locations. It is the shared obligation of all employees to individually and jointly act to prevent or defuse actual or implied violent behavior at work. Violence of the threat of violence, by or against any employee of the Fire District or other person is unacceptable and contrary to Fire District policy...”

The undersigned finds a preponderance of the evidence that Tapia, Gammie, Boudrias, Baldwin, and Hutchison all violated Group III Offenses Nos. 9 and 22. As a threshold matter, neither No. 9 nor No. 22 provide an exception for “consensual” conduct. Yet even providing the benefit of the doubt that being shocked by the device was truly a “suggestion,” the power imbalance between more senior employees and the probationary/apprentice employees that this “suggestion” was made to undermines the credibility of any claimed consent. A supervisor’s “suggestion” to a probationary employee that they allow themselves to be subjected to the administration of electric shocks via a modified bug zapper device at minimum “tends to adversely affect the employee’s relationship to the job and/or their co-workers.” Likewise, with respect to No. 22, the shock from the Device certainly constitutes “physical force,” and that force appears to be used in such a way that senior employees are “abusing¹⁰” junior employees.

Recommended Discipline

The undersigned has also been requested by the District to make disciplinary recommendations. Accordingly, the undersigned recommends as follows:

Roberto “Rocky” Tapia: While Tapia was certainly an aggressor in this conduct, the undersigned also finds it to be substantially mitigating that Tapia ultimately reported this behavior and provided actionable evidence. While his participation in these unfortunate activities cannot be without consequence, the undersigned finds it appropriate to balance the importance of encouraging reporting of this type of highly inappropriate behavior against the need to punish Tapia for his involvement in the behavior. Balancing those interests, the undersigned recommends Tapia receive discipline in the form of a 48-hour unpaid suspension.

Kayla Gammie: Unlike the other accused, there is no evidence that Gammie was an instigator in this misconduct: there is no evidence that she participated in modifying the Device, that she personally used the Device on junior employees, or that it was her idea to subject junior employees to the Device. Nevertheless, she was a willing participant with respect to the Lohse incident in Videos 3 and 4 insofar as she was part of the group questioning Lohse under the threat of being shocked for wrong answers. To her credit, Gammie admitted she violated the aforementioned policies in her interview and took responsibility for her actions. Balancing the level of her misconduct and taking into account that she accepted responsibility for her actions, the undersigned recommends Gammie receive discipline in the form of a 48-hour unpaid suspension.

Douglas Boudrias: Based on the testimonial evidence obtained during this investigation, Boudrias was one of the main instigators of this conduct along with Hutchison and Baldwin. Further, even if Boudrias was not one of the instigators, he was an acting supervisor on both the March 22 and September 6, 2024, incidents and failed to make any attempt to intervene, let alone report it. Moreover, even at the time of his interview and after being presented with the video evidence and confronted with the alleged policy violations, Boudrias refused to accept any

¹⁰ “Abuse” is defined by Merriam-Webster, in relevant part, as “to put to a wrong or improper use,” or “physical maltreatment,” or “improper... use or treatment.”

responsibility for his misconduct. Accordingly, the undersigned recommends discipline in the form of termination.

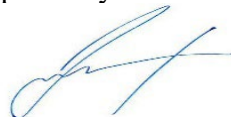
Christopher Baldwin: Baldwin was identified by multiple witnesses as an instigator in using the Device on junior employees, and he is also seen questioning Lohse under threat of a shock from the Device. The undersigned has considered Baldwin's explanation that he did not have a duty to act as a supervisor when he observed the activity at issue because he had never been explicitly told by the District that this type of behavior was forbidden. The undersigned does not find this to be a credible mitigating factor but rather a further reflection on Baldwin's poor judgment as a supervisor. Potential misconduct is infinitely variable and it is not reasonable to expect SLFCD to specifically articulate every conceivable action that could constitute a violation of policy. It should not need specific reference in policy to understand that it is not appropriate to haze subordinate probationary personnel in the form of administering electric shocks through a modified bug zapper device. Accordingly, the undersigned recommends discipline in the form of termination.

Jordon Hutchison: As set forth in detail above, the Device belonged to and was modified by Hutchison. Hutchison was part of the group of instigators in using this device on junior employees, and Hutchison himself appeared to be the individual triggering¹¹ the shock when it was used on Lohse, Edmondson, and Kirkham. Hutchison was acting as a supervisor (an FTO) when he engaged in this conduct. Further, even after being presented with the evidence and confronted with the alleged policy violations, Hutchison refused to accept any responsibility for his highly inappropriate conduct. Accordingly, the undersigned recommends discipline in the form of termination.

V. CLOSING REMARKS

Should you have any questions regarding this report or any other matters relating to this investigation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully Submitted,



John "J.K." W. Keller, IV, Esq.

¹¹ The undersigned acknowledged and considered the testimony of some witnesses that the Device had two triggers – one on the Device's black handle and one that remote trigger – and that, in some circumstances, the employees being shocked were depressing the trigger on the Device's black handle themselves. Nevertheless, the Device did not deliver a shock until Hutchison depressed the remote trigger.