

2014-2015

ANNUAL
REPORT

VI. APPENDIX



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Curtis P. Jacobson

**SUBJECT: 2014-2015 FIRE DEPARTMENT
ABSENCE AND VACANCY RATES
AND THEIR IMPACT ON OVERTIME**

DATE: September 30, 2015

Approved

Date

9/30/2015

INFORMATION ONLY

PURPOSE

This annual report on 2014-2015 absence and vacancy rates and their impact on overtime in the Fire Department is prepared in response to the City Auditor's April 2001 "Audit of the City of San José Fire Department's Overtime Expenditures" (Overtime Audit). Overtime funding and relief staffing levels are reviewed annually to ensure they are appropriately measured, funded, and managed. This 2014-2015 report presents absence and vacancy data for the Fire Department, outlines current staffing levels and projected attrition, and provides a discussion of relief staffing based on five years of data (2010-2011 through 2014-2015).

SUMMARY

Total absence hours in 2014-2015 of 350,015 dropped by 4% from 363,280 absence hours in 2013-2014. This decrease in absence hours was largely due to a decrease in disability hours (from 95,590 hours in 2013-2014 to 68,922 hours in 2014-2015). Vacancies in 2014-2015, however, increased from 27,328 hours (1.5% vacancy rate) in 2013-2014 to 71,792 hours (3.8% vacancy rate) in 2014-2015. In 2014-2015, the combined absence and vacancy rate was 22.6%, requiring 421,807 duty hours to be backfilled¹.

BACKGROUND

Concern regarding the Fire Department's over-expenditures in its overtime budget led to the release of a 2001 Overtime Audit. Prior to 2005-2006, the Fire Department was unable to bring overtime expenditures within its annual overtime budget allocation. However, from 2006-2007 through 2014-2015, the Fire Department's overtime year-end expenditures were lower than budgeted levels. Through 2011-2012, the Fire Department has reported on its annual absence and vacancy rates and their impact on overtime to the Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support (PSFSS) Committee. At the PSFSS Committee meeting on March 21, 2013, the Administration's

¹ In 2013-2014, the combined impact of the absence and vacancy rate of 21% required 390,608 hours of backfill.

recommendation to incorporate the Fire Department’s annual absence and vacancy rates and their impact on overtime into the Annual Report was approved.

ANALYSIS

With all companies in service, the Department maintains 180 daily line positions². When absences or vacancies occur, relief personnel and/or off-duty personnel are brought back to work on overtime to backfill duty positions to the extent overtime funding is available. When funding is not available, however, some companies are taken out of service, otherwise known as “browned out”. In 2014-2015, two squad companies were browned out when staffing was not available and forecasted overtime expenditures did not support use of personnel on overtime. Through diligent analysis of operational impacts and overtime usage, the Fire Department, with the support of the City Manager’s Budget Office, continued to successfully manage its overtime budget. The Fire Department’s 2014-2015 total modified overtime budget was \$8.5 million. Total overtime expenditures were \$8.1 million. Of the \$421,000 balance in overtime, \$347,000 was rebudgeted to 2015-2016 for special operations training³ and Fire Engineer and Firefighter academies not completed in 2014-2015.

Absence Rates

The Fire Department analyzes absence and vacancy rates to determine the most efficient relief staffing and overtime complement to meet daily minimum staffing. The following table displays the 2014-2015 absence hours by type of absences and by rank. Absence hours are hours where assigned personnel were not available to fill daily staffing slots due to vacation, illness, disability, modified duty, compensatory time, funeral leave, jury duty, and administrative assignments. For 2014-2015, the Fire Department’s absence hours for sworn line personnel in the ranks of Battalion Chief, Fire Captain, Fire Engineer, and Firefighter totaled 350,015 hours.

*Chart 1: Absence Hours by Type & Rank: 2014-2015
(excludes sworn positions on administrative assignment)*

Rank	# of Budgeted Line Positions⁴	Vacation	Sick Leave	Disability	Modified Duty	Misc[*]	Total Absence Hours
Battalion Chief	18	5,652	2,335	3,332	713	503	12,535
Fire Captain ⁵	152	39,890	18,529	23,463	16,785	1,682	100,348
Fire Engineer	226	47,012	28,375	23,349	17,723	4,477	120,935
Firefighter	243	37,017	27,226	18,779	30,432	2,743	116,197
	Total Absence Hours (2014-2015)	129,571	76,465	68,922	65,653	9,405	350,015
	Total Absence Hours (2013-2014)	125,377	74,619	95,590	61,665	6,029	363,280

^{*} Miscellaneous absence hours due to compensatory time off, funeral leave, witness, military, administrative

² Daily line positions (with no brown-outs) included 5 Battalion Chiefs, 42 Fire Captains, 64 Fire Engineers, 23 Firefighters and 46 Firefighter/Paramedics.

³ Hazardous Incident, Urban Search and Rescue, and Airport Rescue and Firefighting

⁴ No change in budgeted positions from 2013-2014

⁵ One Fire Captain was reassigned during 2014-2015 from an administrative assignment to the line

From Chart 1, total absence hours of 350,015 in 2014-2015 decreased by 13,265 hours (4%) from the 363,280 hours in 2013-2014. This decrease was largely due to a significant drop in absences attributed to disability hours (drop of about 26,700 hours). The 28% decrease in disability absence hours was partially offset by increased absences due to vacation, sick leave, modified duty, and other miscellaneous hours.

With 639 line positions in 2014-2015, total absence hours were equivalent to 548 absence hours per line person (compared to 569 in 2013-2014). Although these absence hours are not always taken in full-shift (24-hour) increments, the 2014-2015 absence level was equivalent to about 22.8 shifts per line person (compared to 2013-2014's 23.7 shifts) out of approximately 120 total shifts per year.

Vacancy Rates

Vacancies in sworn ranks occur due to retirements from the organization or separations from employment. In 2014-2015, the Fire Department's emergency response line positions were vacant for a total of 71,792 hours, or a 3.8% vacancy rate. In September 2014, a Firefighter Recruit Academy was conducted with 22 Firefighters filling duty positions in January 2015. A Firefighter Recruit Academy initially planned for May/June 2015 was delayed until September 2015 to implement improvements in the recruitment process such as bilingual pre-assessment. At the end of 2014-2015, the Department had 30 sworn vacancies. A fully staffed 18-week Firefighter Recruit Academy will begin on September 28, 2015, with 25 recruits expected to be on line assignments by January 2016.

Backfill for Line Positions

On a daily basis, absences and vacancies in line positions are supplemented with relief personnel and/or off-duty personnel who are brought back on overtime to backfill these positions to meet minimum staffing requirements. Total absence and vacancy rate of 22.6% in 2014-2015 required 421,807 hours of backfill. In 2013-2014, the combined absence and vacancy rate of 21.0% required 390,608 hours of backfill.

Chart 2: Absence and Vacancy by Rank: 2014-2015 vs 2013-2014

Rank	2014-2015 Total Hours	2014-2015 Absence Hours	2014-2015 Vacancy Hours	2014-2015 Hours Requiring Backfill	2014-2015 Total Absence & Vacancy Rate	2013-2014 Absence & Vacancy Rate
Battalion Chief	52,560	12,535	2,352	14,887	28.3%	27.7%
Fire Captain	443,840	100,348	10,976	111,324	25.1%	25.1%
Fire Engineer	659,920	120,935	33,152	154,087	23.3%	20.2%
Firefighter	709,560	116,197	25,312	141,509	19.9%	18.7%
Total	1,865,880	350,015	71,792	421,807	22.6%	21.0%

Staffing Levels and Anticipated Retirements

In preparing projections of near-term and long-range vacancies, staff analyzes sworn personnel's years of service and age ranges and, based on various retirement eligibility scenarios⁶, prepares staffing projections. For 2015-2016, staff projects approximately 40 sworn retirements and five resignations. The September 2015 Academy will fill 25 of the 30 current sworn vacancies, leaving a balance of 5. Factoring in 14 new positions funded by SAFER 2014, a total of 64 vacancies⁷ will require 2.5 Academies, which were fully funded in the 2015-2016 Adopted Budget.

Relief Staffing

To summarize, when a daily line position is unfilled, either due to an absence or a vacancy, the position must be backfilled in order for a company to remain in service. There are three ways in which this can occur: overtime, relief personnel, or by providing higher class pay to staff in a lower rank to backfill the position (which also then requires backfill). Staff plans the use of the Department's budgeted overtime funding level based on relief staffing needed and on assumptions regarding absences and vacancies. (The Department's relief model is described below.) If vacancies exceed staff estimates, a recommendation to reallocate savings from vacant positions to overtime is brought forward for City Council consideration. If absences exceed staff estimates, staff will determine if funding can be reallocated from other budgeted activities. If additional funding to staff units on an overtime basis is not available, a brown out situation would occur, based on previous City Council approval. In 2014-2015, the Department managed its resources to ensure that no fire engines were browned out and no more than two squad companies were taken out of service each day.

The Department's relief model estimates the number of relief positions needed to backfill absences and vacancies when there are the fewest hours of absence and vacancy during the year (baseline). The baseline is the lowest number of absence and vacancy hours used by the personnel in each rank in any 2014-2015 pay period. Once the baseline is established based on the actual absence and vacancy data, it can then be determined, by rank, how many relief positions should be staffed. The 2014-2015 baseline hours (lowest absence and vacancy hours that occurred in any pay period) excluding Battalion Chief positions⁸ are as follows:

- Fire Captain = 3,257 hours (in 2013-2014 = 3,182 hours)
- Fire Engineer = 5,038 hours (in 2013-2014 = 3,875 hours)
- Firefighter = 3,587 hours (in 2013-2014 = 4,429 hours)

Consistent with prior years' reports, to determine baseline hours by rank, five years of data by rank on absence and vacancy hours are used to smooth out potential anomalies in any given year. Utilizing this methodology a comparison of the vacancy/absence baseline hours and coverage hours by relief staff is presented in the following table.

⁶ Retirement eligibility scenarios include 30 years of service at any age; 50 years of age with 25 years of service; and 55 years of age with 20 years of service

⁷ 64 vacancies = 5 remaining unfilled as of September 2015 + 40 eligible for retirement + 14 SAFER 2014 + 5 estimated resignations)

⁸ Consistent with prior reports, Battalion Chief positions are excluded from baseline analysis due to the number of duty positions (15 for 3 shifts)

Chart 3: Average Five-Year Baseline Data and Relief Personnel (Hours)

	Average Absence and Vacancy Hours Baseline	Coverage by Relief Staff	Coverage by Relief (shortfall)/surplus	Relief Staff Needed to Cover Average Baseline Absence and Vacancy (FTE needed)
Fire Captain	3,173	2,576	(597)	5.33 FTE needed
Fire Engineer	4,021	3,808	(213)	1.90 FTE needed
Firefighter	4,191	5,040	849	7.58 FTE available
Total	11,385	11,424	39	0.4 FTE available

Based on the above chart, the number of relief positions meets the minimum coverage required to fill line positions. As previously described, however, to fill vacancies in line positions, a person in a lower ranked position who has the qualifications/certifications to fill a higher ranked vacancy could be utilized to fill the higher ranked vacancy as needed. The Fire Department will continue to evaluate the relief staff needed by rank based on longer-term trends and any recommendation for position adjustments will be brought forward for City Council consideration as necessary in the future.

CONCLUSION

Lower absence hours experienced in 2014-2015, largely attributed to decreased disability hours, have resulted in a decrease in hours required for backfill through use of relief personnel and overtime. However, higher vacancy rates due to large number of retirements and fewer academies offset the lower absence hours resulting in a net increase of 1.6% in the total absence and vacancy rate and corresponding required backfill hours as compared to 2013-2014 levels. With the planned academies for 2015-2016, and if the lower absence hours continue, it is expected that the total absence and vacancy rates will be lower by the end of this fiscal year. Department staff will continue its analysis of absences, relief staffing, and overtime usage, including potential impact of its safety and wellness initiative programs. The Fire Department continues to work with its employees and its partners to improve overall Firefighter safety and reduce absences and its impact on services to the community.

/s/

CURTIS P. JACOBSON
Interim Fire Chief