

**Case No. 2011-26 Take Home  
Vehicle Hotline Inquiry**



**City of Norfolk**

**Office of the City Auditor**

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## **Recreation, Parks and Open Space (RPOS)**

12-6H

March 23, 2012

### **Background and Purpose**

Our office received on March 27, 2011 an anonymous call on the Fraud Hotline inquiring why a City of Norfolk Parks and Forestry pickup truck is being used by a city employee who lives in the Pungo section of Virginia Beach to go back and forth to work. The caller continued, indicating with all the money problems that the City is having, this seems to be a waste of money in terms of gas being used. This report provides our findings and conclusions of the investigation.

### **Scope**

Our objective was to determine the existence of possible waste and abuse regarding the use of a City of Norfolk Parks and Forestry pickup truck by a city employee. As part of our examination of this matter, we took the following actions:

- Obtained, reviewed, and analyzed incident logs;
- Benchmarked with surrounding cities;
- Obtained, reviewed, and analyzed Fuel Transaction Detail Reports maintained by Fleet Management;
- Interviewed and inquired with the Department of Recreation Parks and Open Space management and personnel; and
- Gathered an understanding of who receives after hours calls, how calls are documented, and the frequency of received calls.

Our office determined the authenticity of the allegation contained in the subject Hotline Case and ensured that investigation and resolution activities were undertaken in response to the allegation found authentic, which investigation and resolution activities were conducted in the most cost-effective and confidential manner available. The investigation was under the control and at the direction of the City Auditor; responsibility for investigation and resolution of the allegation was not assigned to other investigative and law-enforcement personnel.

Our office having not found, within our professional judgment, that money or property is missing, or fraud or misappropriation or other similar irregularities have occurred, did not notify the Mayor, the Council Audit Committee or the City Attorney. Thus, such notification did not impede or hinder any investigation then pending. Our office notified the City Manager, believing it to be in the best interest of the city and we were provided with City Management's response on February 6, 2012.

### **Conclusions, Findings and Recommendations**

From our inquiry and discussion with management in Recreation Parks and Open Space (RPOS), the allegation was correct; there is a city employee who lives in Pungo and has a city truck as a take home vehicle. While the employee in question has a take home vehicle, our review did not reveal possible abuse or



material waste. In addition, our review did not indicate the employee violated a city policy or procedure or acted inappropriately in performing his job duties.

RPOS management indicated that the employee in question has a take home vehicle because he is the on-call representative. As an on-call representative, he responds to after hour calls for the removal of tree and limb debris from roadways and other areas. Management further elaborated that the employee is uniquely qualified based on his arboriculture experience, technical skills, equipment knowledge, interpersonal and supervisory skills, and rapport with other city agencies and private utility companies.

From gathering an understanding of who receives after hour calls, how calls are documented, and the frequency of calls received; we learned a log is maintained of after hours incidents. The log details the following information: description of the incident, which employee (who) responded to the incident and worked on site, hours worked, and the site address. Our review of the log for July 1, 2007 through May 17, 2011 (covering FY's 08, 09, 10 and 10 months of FY 11, represents nearly four years of data) indicated the employee in question responded to 67 calls in comparison to 37 for the other employees assigned with similar job responsibilities (See Table 1 below).

Given there are 365 days in a year or fiscal year, except for a leap year, the data above suggests the employee in question used his assigned take home vehicle on average ranging from only 1% (5 incidents/365 days) to 8% (29 incidents/366 days) of the time to respond to after hours emergencies in FY 08 and FY 11, respectively. These two fiscal years represent the highest and lowest number of calls responded to by the employee in question. Considering a roundtrip from home to work for the employee is 54.68 miles, the schedule contained in Appendix 1 of this report, shows the percentage of purchased fuel attributed to this commute and the associated cost. The percentage of purchased fuel related to the daily commute varied annually from 47% to 63% with cost ranging from \$2,011 to \$2,302.

From benchmarking with surrounding cities on how they handle after hours tree and limb emergencies, we noted the following practices:

- a. In one city, the Public Works Streets and Maintenance department is responsible for removing tree and limb debris. A duty officer, who is a supervisor, is on call to handle these instances. The on call supervisor is rotated on a weekly basis and during this period will use a take home vehicle and an assigned cell phone. These employees are eligible for overtime when they respond to a call and also receive the standard on call/standby pay.
- b. In another city, the two employees in the Parks and Recreation department responsible for removing tree and limb debris rotate this responsibility. When a call is received they will report to the office, obtain the needed equipment and then respond to the scene. These individuals do not have a take home vehicle.

<b>Number of Incidents Responded to by Parks and Forestry Employees</b>					
	FY 08	FY 09	FY 10	FY 11 through 5/17/11	Total
Employee-In-Question	29	19	14	5	67
Others Employees	7	10	5	15	37
Total Instances	36	29	19	20	104

**Table 1**



We realize after hours removal of tree and limb debris is a valuable service provided to the Norfolk citizens and city departments, in particular, for safety reasons; however, the following points suggest that the employee in question possibly does not need to have a take home vehicle:

1. The gas expenses incurred compared to the number of after hours responses do not appear to be economical.
2. Another bureau employee has a take home vehicle that lives in Norfolk and can respond to after hours incidents.
3. Other cities rotate the take home vehicle or do not use a take home vehicle to respond to after hours incidents.

Given the distance the employee in question lives from Norfolk and the irregularity of incidents (1.5 to 3 a month), we suggest the following alternative options would provide a more efficient and economical approach for after-hours removal of tree and limb debris:

1. Instead of the employee having a daily take home vehicle to respond to incidents, have the employee come to the shop, obtain a vehicle and needed equipment, and subsequently be reimbursed for mileage.
2. Rotate the “on call” status and use one vehicle between the two employees that would be responsible for responding to after hours incidents.

In response to the details, conclusions, and recommendations presented above, the Director of Recreation Parks and Open Space, through correspondence and discussion on August 17 and 24, 2011,

respectively, offered the following points as the basis for the employee’s continued use of a take home vehicle:

- He is the only supervisor of tree crews in the Bureau; this isn’t a crew leader position. Crew leaders aren’t certified arborists and the City needs someone with this professional certification when dealing with the public.
- He is responsible for all three tree crews as well as the stump grinding and pruning crews.
- He is a certified arborist and can diagnose and evaluate tree problems and also does the tree work himself. This saves overtime expenses for crews and others having to mobilize and go out.
- He has been on call and had this take home vehicle for 20 years as the supervisor of tree crews. He has been employed with the City for over 30 years.
- His responsibilities are 50% administrative – 50% hands on.
- The other Bureau employee that has a take home vehicle is in enforcement and this is a position of administration (95% administrative 5% hands on).
- If the employee in question does not have the take home vehicle, there would be a delay in response time because the employee would have to go to the shop, obtain a vehicle and needed equipment prior to reporting to the incident. This is also a safety issue for the employee because the employee could have to go into the shop late at night.

We find the above justifications reasonable. However, we ask that



management still consider our suggested options and approaches. We appreciate management's attention that has been given to this matter as well as the insight provided.

### **MANAGEMENT RESPONSE**

The City's Tree Crew Supervisor is a certified Arborist and is in a unique position that provides our residents with a high level of competency 24 hours a day, seven days a week. While \$2,500 a year may seem excessive to some to receive efficient and effective response to issues facing our tree canopy, there exists a business case that support this method of management as compared to an alternate. Not only is he the supervisor of the Bureau, he also can perform the needed work. Efficiencies are achieved as this high level of skill can assess, direct and/or perform needed services. We will continue to evaluate alternate methods of delivering this level of customer service as employees with sufficient skill sets are presented to the Department.

## Appendix 1

<b>Schedule of Calculation for Approximate Annual Average Cost</b>							
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Total Cost of Gallons Purchased<sup>+</sup> (a)</b>	<b>Total Gallons Purchased<sup>+</sup> (b)</b>	<b>Average Cost Per Gallon c=(a/b)</b>	<b>Estimated Annual Round Trip Miles Driven<sup>++</sup> (d)</b>	<b>Estimated Miles Per Gallon<sup>+++</sup> (e)</b>	<b>Approximate Annual Commute Cost f=(d/e)c</b>	<b>Percentage of Annual Commute Cost to Total Cost of Gallons Purchased g=( f/a)</b>
2008	\$4,909.84	1,940.75	\$2.53	11,373	12.50	\$2,302	47%
2009	\$3,415.03	1,633.95	\$2.09	11,373	11.82	\$2,011	59%
2010	\$3,526.80	1,689.50	\$2.09	11,373	10.81	\$2,199	62%
2011	\$3,342.90	1,428.15	\$2.34	10,061	11.10	\$2,121	63%

\*Source: Fuel Transaction Detail Report provided by Fleet Management

<sup>++</sup>54.68 x 208 days (2,080 work hours/10 hour days) = 11,373

54.68 x 184 days (208 days - 24 days from end of fiscal year 2011) = 10,061

Note: The employee works 10 hour days and is off every Friday, working four days a week. Since our review covered up until 5/17/11 of FY 11, the remaining 24 days for which the employee would have worked in FY 11 are not included. The number of miles the employee commutes to and from home is approximately 54.68.

<sup>+++</sup>The estimated miles per gallon represent the average of actual MPG calculated based on the miles driven divided by the gallons purchased. However, we excluded any anomalies from our calculation. We considered an anomaly to be a calculated MPG that was comparatively too high or low. Such situations existed when an odometer reading was not correctly inputted at the gas pump when gas was purchased.