

Report on State Audit Implementation



Creating a Healthy, Safe and
Equitable Workplace for **All**

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

June 2023

Message from the General Manager



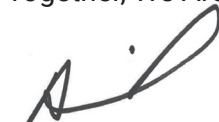
Metropolitan's talented, experienced and dedicated staff is the finest in our industry, and our team works hard to ensure that 19 million Southern Californians have reliable, high-quality water, despite the many challenges we face.

I'm forever grateful for our team's excellence in service to our organization, our member agencies and our communities.

As General Manager, it's my job to ensure that our workplace is safe, welcoming, and collaborative, and that all members of our team are treated with respect. That's why I have prioritized responding to concerns identified by the independent Shaw Law Group workplace assessment report, and why I have committed to implementing all of the recommendations published by the California State Auditor.

Our work to ensure our workplace is safe, healthy, fair and equitable never stops, and I will continue to look for ways our agency can serve our employees better. They deserve it.

Together, We Are One



Adel Hagekhalil



Implementation

Creating healthy, safe, fair and equitable workplace for all



In April 2022, the California State Auditor published an audit, detailing longstanding problems with Metropolitan’s handling of allegations of discrimination and harassment in the workplace, its hiring practices, the structure of its ethics office and aging employee housing at its desert facilities.

Metropolitan responded by agreeing to address the Auditor’s 19 recommendations and worked immediately to implement them. The agency had already initiated significant workplace improvements prior to the

Audit that were identified in an independent workplace climate assessment conducted by an outside law firm, the Shaw Law Group.

MWD established an Audit Response Team, which met biweekly to ensure full implementation of all recommendations within the State Auditor’s deadlines. Metropolitan fully implemented 5 recommendations within the first 60 days, an additional 12 recommendations within six months, and the remaining two recommendations before the April 21, 2023, deadline.

As of April 21, the State Auditor assessed 15 of 19 recommendations as fully implemented. The remaining four were fully implemented on schedule and have been submitted for the State Auditor’s assessment.

A dashboard showing the status of each recommendation is posted on Metropolitan’s website. The Board received regular updates throughout the year. A summary of the recommendations implemented over the past year is provided below. Executive Management remains committed to ongoing improvements to protect and support our workforce and will continue to evaluate our progress.

Implementation Dashboard Link

A dashboard showing the status of each recommendation is posted on Metropolitan’s website at mwdh2o.com/better-workplace.

Best Practices

Implementing Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)

New EEO Policies

- Updated the EEO policy, which now includes a robust definition and examples of retaliation, written investigatory procedures, all state and federal laws, and information for employees about their rights to file complaints with state and federal agencies.
- Updated the sexual harassment policy.
- Developed a policy defining and prohibiting abusive conduct.
- Established a process for regularly reviewing the policy to determine whether changes are needed.

New EEO Office

- Established a new EEO Office structured to operate interpedently and impartially, reporting directly to the General Manager.
- Hired agency's first Equal Employment Opportunity officer, Jonaura Wisdom, who started on April 18, 2021. Staffing includes a Deputy Chief EEO Officer, and a Chief EEO Investigator positions to manage the work of the EEO Office, with formal, written responsibilities for specific staff within the office.



New EEO Investigation Procedures

- Investigation procedures now include time frames for responding to, investigating and closing EEO complaints that match DFEH best practices.*
- Staff provide quarterly reports to the Board including the number of EEO complaints received and investigated. All personnel-related settlements that invoke confidentiality or have any financial impact are reported quarterly to the Board's Legal and Claims Committee. Information reported to the Board will include whether Metropolitan has taken any corrective action in response to the alleged issues.
- Developed procedures and trained staff on how to handle and refer complaints to the EEO office.
- Developed conflict of interest policies for EEO investigations, including how third parties, such as the Ethics office, can participate in investigations to ensure impartiality.
- Developed centralized and electronic recordkeeping to track EEO complaints, the outcome of investigations, and employee settlement agreements to allow staff to monitor status and provide accurate and timely reports.
- Developed written, formal process and factors to consider when deciding to issue discipline and keep adequate records to document the process.
- Developed written procedures to intervene in potential retaliation while EEO investigations are ongoing and dedicated staff to follow up with complainants to prevent retaliation.



Ensuring an Equitable and Accountable Hiring Process

- Adopted and published a screening process for applications based on defined criteria, clear instructions for justifying hiring decisions, and retention requirements that are aligned with processes and standards of the hiring procedures.*
- Formally trained hiring managers and human resources staff on their roles and responsibilities and established ongoing training for new managers.*
- Reinstated the EEO office's role in the hiring process to help avoid bias.
- Developed formal procedures for analyzing employee demographics and taking appropriate action based on those data, which will be regularly reported to the Board.*
- Established guidelines requiring staff to annually report its demographic analysis to the Board and share this data with management groups and recruiting staff.

Best Practices

Ethics, Housing and Safety

Strengthening the Independence of the Ethics Office

- Prohibited interested parties from participating in the Office's investigation process, interested parties from participating in the office's investigation process, except when necessary to provide information or otherwise respond to allegations.
- Established additional best practices, such as ensuring that the Ethics Officer has sole authority to interpret Metropolitan's ethics rules and that the Ethics Office can obtain advice from outside legal counsel.

Improving Housing Conditions at Desert Facilities

- Established procedures for responding to maintenance requests were improved and clear expectations for timeline for resolving problems.
- Track the length of time to respond and fix housing issues, and regularly report this data to the Board
- Developed a contingency plan for comprehensively addressing long-term housing issues in case Metropolitan's current plan for replacing employee housing is delayed.



Improving Workplace Safety

- Revised safety policies to establish a minimum level of collaboration between safety representatives and management, requiring managers to attend safety committee meetings.
- Enhanced written policies to protect workers who make safety complaints by defining retaliation in writing and creating specific steps to prevent retaliation.



Note: items marked with * indicate MWD has implemented these reforms and reported their status to the State Auditor, and the State Auditor's assessment is pending.





*THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA*