



## **OFFICE OF THE CHIEF**

FILE NO.: 21-002  
DATE: January 22, 2021  
TO: All Personnel  
FROM: Colin Stowell, Fire Chief  
SUBJECT: Offensive Displays in the Workplace

Earlier this week the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) San Diego Chapter sent city elected officials a letter communicating concern and citing the existence of a toxic culture and hostile work environment for some members of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department. Symbols and stickers with a nexus to divisiveness seen on department equipment as well as demeaning pictures displayed at fire stations were provided in the letter as examples of such a culture and unacceptable workplace. While these images are outdated, previously addressed and many long since removed, they still portray a derogatory message that we as a diverse and professional organization should never tolerate. Although I do not believe we have a “toxic culture” within our department, and I truly believe our members remain aware of the sensitivity to their coworkers, these images are reminders that even isolated instances meant to be humorous and unintentional references can be offensive and should never be tolerated.

This Office of the Chief is intended to be an affirmation of our commitment to maintaining a workplace that is free from any hostility and/or displays which could be disparaging towards an individual or group and offensive to employees. Often these displays are subtle and never intended to be offensive, so I ask that we all use the perspective of others when evaluating what is appropriate to say or post for display. We would all agree that our goal is to refrain from anything that could even unintentionally disrupt the respect and harmony we share in all our work environments. And while supervisors have the responsibility to enforce policies and address anything inappropriate in the workplace, it's everyone's responsibility to support and embrace the principles and values of our department through shared respect and appreciation for each other.

I have directed through Chief Webber to have all Battalion Chiefs and Lieutenants perform immediate workplace inspections for any inappropriate material which may be perceived as demeaning or offensive to an individual or group. I also remind everyone that City employees have a variety of options to report circumstances or items in the workplace that they believe violate City policies.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation and commitment to ensuring we always maintain a harmonious workplace our department has been so proud of.