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DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC WORKS

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SOLID WASTE DIVISION

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February 14, 1989

Transportation and Community Development/
Budget and Finance Committees
Sacramento, California

Honorable Members in Session:

SUBJECT: SOLID WASTE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION INFORMATIONAL REPORT

SUMMARY

This report provides information on various aspects of solid waste customer satisfaction to follow up on a survey conducted by a consultant in July, 1988.

BACKGROUND

On September 20, 1988 the joint committees of Transportation and Community Development/Budget and Finance were presented a report by the Solid Waste Division of Public Works which summarized the findings of the customer satisfaction survey conducted by J. D. Franz Research. The survey found that 94.8% of City residents are satisfied or very satisfied with their garbage collection service, and 92.1% believe the City is doing an "excellent" or "good" job at handling the garbage collection. Also, of the 30.2% of residents who have had occasion to call the City about garbage service, over three quarters were satisfied with the outcomes of the calls and said the customer assistance person was courteous and took appropriate action.

The survey also found that, of those few residents who expressed some dissatisfaction, there were specific areas of the garbage collection service that had problems. Staff was directed to address these problem areas and report back at the time of the mid-year budget review (approximately, mid-February).

The Sacramento Charter Commission on Government Reorganization recently hired another consultant to conduct a study of registered voters in Sacramento City and County. The results of this opinion survey are very similar to the J. D. Franz survey done for the City. Meta Information Services conducted the voter survey in November, 1988 for the Charter Commission. Following are excerpts from the final report to the Charter Commission.

A major objective of the study was to evaluate services currently provided by local governments. It was felt that the greater the dissatisfaction with services provided by government, the stronger the rationale for government reorganization. Respondents were, therefore, read a lengthy list of services currently provided by government, ranging from garbage collection to regional air quality. Respondents were asked to rate each service as either poor, fair, good or excellent.

As an aid to interpreting answers to valutive questions, an valutive index was calculated for each question.Index values below 120 should be regarded as deserving remediation. Evaluations above 130 should be considered exemplary.

Two of the services tested were highly regarded. Leading the list was garbage collection with an amazing index value of 170. Garbage collection was high for both the City and the County. Also scoring high was parks with an index value of 146.

Because of the high rating given garbage collection, the Meta report to the Charter Commission did not consider garbage collection in the remainder of the study on possible government reorganization. The results of this study independently confirm the high customer satisfaction ratings reported to the City by J. D. Franz Research several months earlier.

The few problem areas identified by City residents in the Franz study, and the actions taken by staff are summarized in the following sections.

MISSES

In the survey, 4.5% of City residents had experienced 2 or more pickup misses during the previous year. About 29% of these misses were attributed to the residents themselves, and not the City. Therefore, residents claimed that the City was responsible for 3.2% of residents experiencing 2 or more missed collections over a one year period. Most residents said they called the City when their garbage was not collected on the appointed day.

There are several factors known to staff which influence the number of misses. One of these is the implementation of the automated collection system which has resulted in a learning curve for both residents and Sanitation Workers. Service areas, collection days, and personnel are often changed at the time the automated service is initiated in an area. Another factor is the unusually large number of disability exemptions allowed. A disability exemption means the resident does not have to place the garbage container at the curb. When substitute Sanitation Workers fill in for regular personnel during vacations and sick leave, the disabled customers are often the ones missed due to unfamiliarity with the service area. Staff is developing new guidelines for allowing disability exemptions. As the number of disability exemptions is reduced under new guidelines, we expect the rate of missed pickups to decline.

Occasionally, misses occur due to personnel errors. In rare cases of excessive problems with misses, individual employees are retrained, counselled, or disciplined as appropriate.

FOLLOW THROUGH ON MISSES AND SPECIAL ORDERS

According to residents surveyed, of those few who had been missed on their collection day and called the City to report the miss, about 17% claimed the City did not come back to pick up the garbage within the time promised. In response to this problem, operational and organizational changes have been made. Additional staff are now available on late Friday afternoons when this problem is more common. Also, the Customer Services Section of the Solid Waste Division has been placed under the direct supervision of the Solid Waste Collection Superintendent to provide better communication and a clear chain of command from the customer call to the field response.

About 6.6% of residents questioned had called to request a special pick-up (additional service beyond that subscribed on a normal basis). Of those 6.6%, 10% of them said the City did not make the special pickup as agreed. The operational and organizational changes described above also address this problem. Further, employees have been made aware of the results of the customer satisfaction survey as valuable feedback on the services we provide. Special care is being given to the follow through on these items.

CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE TELEPHONE RESPONSE

The survey identified that 30.2% of customers have had an occasion to call the City on the telephone in regard to garbage service. About 78% of those who called were satisfied with the outcome of the call, and the vast majority said the City representative on the phone was courteous, answered questions, and took the appropriate action. Even though the survey did not indicate this as a problem area, Councilmembers requested staff to report on level of service of telephone responses to customers.

The Solid Waste Division has a customer services section which handles specific customer needs including general information about the solid waste services provided by the City, response to collection misses, current rates for service, all commercial service assistance, and requests for one time special or additional service. Some actions are not handled by the Solid Waste Division, but must be directed to the Revenue Division of the Finance Department. The Revenue Division handles all inquiries related to billing for service, starts and stops for residential service, and service suspensions during vacations.

There are four incoming phone lines for customer service calls, one for commercial service calls, one for routing, one for the Sanitation Workers to call in to clear at the end of the work day, and one for the Office Supervisor. In addition, there is a 24-hour line for customers to leave recorded messages for the customer services representatives.

In the spring and summer of 1986, the Customer Services Section faced a turnover of 75% of the Typist Clerks plus the Office Supervisor position. The situation was very stressful and difficult, and calls were not being handled effectively. All of the positions were filled, and an additional position added by October, 1986. Also, two new phone lines were installed and existing lines added to other instruments to make phone response more effective. Computer terminals were moved to facilitate easier access for staff. Other changes made to improve customer service included training, changing office hours, and developing and writing procedures.

Service to the customers has continued to be a top priority of the Division. When a person calls the Customer Services Section, after three rings a recorded message tells them that all representatives are busy and to wait on the line. Since that time in mid-1986, various statistics have been kept on the number of calls received by the Division and the number of "drops", those who hang up before their call can be answered by staff. During the first seven months of 1987, this office received an average of 6,602 calls per month, or 302 calls per work day. Of these, there was a 24.4% drop rate. During the recent twelve months of 1988, an average of 5,154 calls per month were received, which is a significant decrease of 21.9%. The daily average declined to 245 calls, and the drop rate was decreased to 13.2%. These statistics would seem to indicate that fewer people are calling because the service has improved, both in the field and in the office. The drop rate has decreased, possibly due to a shorter length of time on hold.

Other recent actions taken to improve telephone response to customer calls include a reorganization which moved Customer Services from the administrative section to the collection section of the Division. This provides a direct communication link with field staff and places customer services staff under the collection manager. A request has been submitted to Personnel to upgrade and reclassify one of the Typist Clerk I/II positions, which is currently vacant, to Typist Clerk III. This would provide backup to the Office Supervisor, a career ladder within the Division from Typist Clerk I through Office Supervisor, more effective supervision and training, and another communication link with the customer who has a difficult or complex problem. The Utility Customer Information System (UCIS) may eventually result in increased capability of responding to customer needs. All of these actions reinforce our commitment to efficient and effective customer service.

FINANCIAL DATA

None.

POLICY MATTERS

None.

MBE/WBE

No impact.

RECOMMENDATION

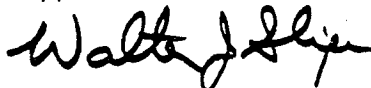
Forward to City Council to file for information.

Respectfully submitted,



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Solid Waste Division Manager

Approved for Information:



FOR

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Assistant City Manager

Approved:



MELVIN H. JOHNSON
Director of Public Works

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Answer Questions:

DAVID A. PELSER, SOLID WASTE DIVISION MANAGER
449-2043

February 14, 1989
All Districts