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**Early Voting has
started! Make
sure you Vote!**

For additional
copies of this
newsletter
please visit
<http://www.cityofdallasemployees.com>

**Do you belong
to the
Steelworkers?
You do if your
Pay stub says
NT Pub E**

City of Dallas Civilian Employees

North Texas Association of Public Employees

Steelworkers Local 9479



Performance Appraisal Terminations?

This year employees who receive less than a fully successful on their performance grading will automatically have a performance improvement plan (PIP) written up for them. This PIP will give the underrated employees eight to twelve weeks to improve their performance or face immediate termination. The same people who gave the less than successful rating will now get to decide if that employee has improved enough to keep their job. This could be a bit of a problem.

While there are admittedly employees who need to improve their performance, there are also a lot of employees who are going to get a bad rating just so someone else in their department can get a really great one. Is it fair to put someone's job in jeopardy just so your department can make the bell curve? No. But fair or not this is what is going to happen.

That our current performance reviews are subjective is not news to anyone. That they more often than not are late, incorrectly done, and provide little coaching or follow up, is not news either. What is news is that two weeks before final reviews were to begin; this very serious procedure change was sprung on the supervisors and managers who score them.

This year is the one year that civilian employees cannot afford to be complacent about their review score. Bad scores need to be fought every step. Even if the bad score is not overturned on appeal, affected employees need to make sure that any Performance Improvement Plan has clear, **achievable** improvements and **measurable** goals. We all know the performance plans are designed to be vague and subjective, but having a vague or subjective PIP would virtually guarantee a job loss.

Should any association member get a score that is below fully successful they need to immediately contact our employee counselors. If you do not receive an answer within an hour; you need to contact them again. Wasting time could cost you your job! Please use the contact information at the top of this page.

Tell the Truth or be Challenged

Steelworker President Ernesto Pena spoke to council during their September 27th meeting. He had originally intended to speak on another topic, but became angry when City Manager Mary Suhm **again** made statements that were untrue, telling the council that this will be the second year that we have not had a health benefit cost increase.

During his speech, Ernesto corrected Ms. Suhm and reminded council that health benefit rates increased last year, 35 to 65 percent for those employees who had the City's HMO plan. When council started to rumble about this being true, Ms. Suhm backed pedaled and said that she meant her statement was about the employees who were under the PPO plan.

It is not like Ms. Suhm has not been asked to refrain from making this **incorrect blanket statement** before. She and numerous high ranking HR reps have been reproached many times for continuing to misrepresent the cost and impact of the city's health benefit programs to the council, the employees and the public.

When challenged by the Steelworkers Ms Suhm and other H.R. reps have again and again reluctantly admitted that their statements did not apply to **all** employees. They have tried to justify this attempt to pass on this untruth as a misunderstanding or a misstatement. Once, possibly twice can be a mistake, any more than that is a deliberate attempt to perpetuate a lie. Granted lies often make better sound bites, but the truth is easier to defend.

Former Council Member Larry Duncan Encourages Organization

Larry Duncan, a current Dallas County School Board member visited us this month during our regular membership meeting. Mr. Duncan discussed how the organization of the Dallas County School bus drivers was helping them. He also encouraged all Dallas City employees to get serious about organizing so they can really have a voice. He states that only by sticking together can we achieve the power to change city policy.

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Employees' Retirement Election

Due to recent charter changes, Employee Retirement Fund Trustee John Jenkins is again up for re-election. His current term will expire on December 31, 2006. As you know, Mr. Jenkins is not only the newest trustee we have but also the youngest. As those of you who heard him speak at the last election forums know, he also has a lot of ideas for the future improvement of the fund.

John Jenkins works for the Park & Recreation Department as a District Manager. He has eleven years of pension service.

He is running against Les Studdard of the Office of Cultural Affairs, James Floyd Harris of Courts and Detention Services, and Egbert Hood of the Office of Financial Services.

After you receive your information packet in the mail, you will be able to vote by phone. Voting will be open from October 24, 2006 thru November 9, 2006

Grievance Deals? Or are they?

Employees who have filed grievances need to be alert for last minute meetings or deals. You should not agree to drop a grievance without alerting your grievance rep and getting the 'deal' in writing.

Some honorable managers will finally see the problem and try to fix it, but unfortunately telling the difference between them and the managers who are trying to find a way to delay and derail your grievance is sometimes difficult. Why would they do this?

1. They need time to scrounge up documentation or witnesses that they did not properly have on hand at the time of the reprimand.

2. They want to stall, hoping that you will drop the thing or miss a deadline by assuming that they will honor their word. Don't. Get it in writing.

3. You have them dead to rights and they need more time to try to think of a way to weasel out of the mess they created.

4. Last minute meetings, they just want to talk to you for a few minutes. They are often looking for something they can twist. Ask if this has anything to do with your grievance. If it does, tell them you need more advanced notice of the meeting so you can have your Association Rep present before you discuss anything. Scott and Dan will thank you. ;D

Blue Cross HMO is being Replaced

According to Lonzie Green, H.R. Benefit Manager, Blue Cross was going to substantially raise their rates again this year. Which would have meant a second year of substantial cost increases since the city would have passed the entire increase on to the city employees who have the HMO plan.

The city intends to replace the HMO plan with an entirely city funded Exclusive Provider Organization (EPO) plan. On paper the plan is similar to our previous HMO. Employees will not need to choose a primary care physician and no referrals will be required to see a specialist.

The plan proposal will use the same providers as the city's PPO plan, and will allow access to the UHC national network for easier coverage when traveling. A side by side comparison of the EPO and the previous HMO plan showed no real differences. When the comparison was looked over by someone who deals with health issues on a daily basis, they found no problems with the stated coverage transfer. They did however warn me that the devil is in the details and they would be interested to see how the final plan will be spelled out in the master agreement.

The EPO this year is basically an experiment. While the city expects to achieve economies due to all the benefits being under one company, there is still some question of exactly how much this will ultimately cost the city. Unlike a normal HMO where the city and the employees pay a fixed rate and the risk of excess charges is entirely assumed by the HMO Company, the EPO will open the city up to additional charges over the amounts paid by the premiums. How much can be saved vs how much more it might cost the city before the year is over is impossible to know. Mr. Green states that to minimize the risk, the city has purchased a Stop-Loss policy in case the number gets too high. No word on what will happen next year for the HMO/EPO group should this occur.

Sadly there is still no plan to look at the HMO (EPO) rates being paid by employees with single coverage vs employees and dependents. Mr. Green stated that they had considered addressing it this year, but they need to look at all the rates, not just the HMO (EPO) rates, so any decisions were postponed until next year. Bummer that. – M.R. Frey

Departmental Performance Appraisal Evaluation Report

As was requested by the Steelworkers this spring, the City Manager Mary Suhm had a Performance Appraisal Evaluation done to see how well the various City Departments were doing in following the rules for the Performance Appraisals. The Steelworkers were invited to look and comment on the rough draft being prepared.

One major disappointment was that this report puts a lot of emphasis on the results of a badly flawed HR survey. The fact that this survey had major problems was not news to HR Director David Ethridge.

One of the problems with the survey referenced was that it was buried by certain departments. The worse problem however was that other departments had their lower level supervisors hand out surveys to their direct reports and then gathered them back up again. How this was supposed to elicit an untainted result of how well their supervisor did their performance appraisal is the big question. But apparently not as far as HR was concerned since they still used the data.

The draft report had several recommendations including one that would **require** every employee's review to be completed (ideally with input from the employees) and then electronically transmitted to HR. at the beginning of the rating period. HR would then track that every employees review plan was done on time. This would eliminate employees being graded on a plan that they did not see until it was time to sign it at the end of the rating period.

It was recommended that supervisors would be required to do mid year (April) reviews to determine each employees progress. There was no mention of whether these would also be submitted to HR to insure compliance.

Other recommendations included one to establish departmental committees to review all high and low ratings. This would be an improvement over the current procedure that most departments use where a single auditor reviews the high and low ratings for appropriateness.

The best recommendation was that HR shall conduct an analysis of supervisor's compliance with the review system with recommended discipline for supervisor non-compliance.

The Steelworkers pointed out that there is no recommendation for outside review of disputed appraisals. This is troubling due to recent training sessions where supervisors were told that only two appeals are possible. Also to keep the level of the appeals as low as possible, the managers are not supposed to see the finished reviews. This is to keep them untainted and available in the appeal process. How untainted they will be is of course going to be really open for argument.

This procedure would not provide much protection to individual employees who have a supervisor problem or are in a troubled department. We pointed out that the appeals need to be able to get out of the department if the city wants to make real progress towards doing them correctly and having them be perceived as fair.

During our conversation, Ms. Suhm did mention the possibility of having a 'Last Resort' appeal panel created somehow. So we pointed out that with the above restriction being put into place, only the very highest of employees would ever reach it. That would be unfair to the lower ranked employees.

Ms. Suhm would favor the "Last Resort" panel over having departments swap final appeals. She feels that there could be problems if an employee had previously worked for and had a bad experience with the swapped department. The Steelworkers disagreed with her on this, pointing out that such problems would be relatively rare and easily fixed.

The main difficulty with a 'Last Resort' appeal panel would be who would run it. Ms. Suhm speculated that it could be assigned to a special group in the HR department. The Steelworker reminded her that placing a 'Last Resort' panel with the department that assists the departments with their disciplinary actions would do absolutely nothing to assure the employees that they would receive a fair appeal. We suggested possibly making the panel part of the Civil Service group. While employees may not always like what they hear from Civil Service, they are perceived as being more independent of the departments than any other group in the city.

It will be interesting to see what suggestions survive and make it into the final recommendations.



Meetings Time

Join us on the **1st Thursday** of each month at 6:00 p.m.

Oakwood Tower,
Suite 411
3626 N. Hall
Street, Dallas
Texas 75219

Don't forget Parking is free in the attached garage & there is also Alley parking



My pay stub says NT Pub E but I never received my membership card, or any mail from the Steelworkers. Why?

For some reason we have a bad or incomplete address for you on your card. Please contact us with the correct address.



Help your Association by helping yourself.

You can help grow your union and get paid at the same time. You can earn \$10.00 for each member you sign up!. And they get a hat and the knowledge that they taking a positive step towards creating a better workplace.



Dues are less than \$5.00 a week; most of us spend more than that at the candy machine.

OFFICERS

President – Ernesto Pena, Housing

Vice President – Mary Hasaan, Council Office

Financial Secretary – Chris King, Sanitation

Recording Secretary Jackie Catron, Water.

Grievance Co-Chairs Michealle Frey & Frantz Orozco, Streets

Guard -Honorio Lara, Parks

Snippets!

Employee Surveys - As a side question to Ms. Suhm we inquired if it would be asking too much to have a fair and unbiased employee appraisal survey done? This 2005 survey was tainted by many of them being handed out and collected by the very supervisor's whose actions were being checked and also by being buried by some divisions. The 2004 survey had answers that were all HR ra-ra slanted and would not allowed you to continue the survey without picking an answer even if you disagreed with all of the choices offered.

We asked if it would be possible to have an independent employee committee over look the survey language and change the distribution methods causing some of these problems **before** the survey went out. Granted HR might not like the results it got, but maybe they would get a real picture of what employees thought and results that were not tainted.

Grapevine Ahead of the Curve? - The City of Grapevine recently had a study done that pointed out both how expensive it was for the city to replace experienced employees and how fluid the Dallas job market was. Apparently replacement costs for even a nonprofessional position can total about \$12,000, higher level employees can cost as much as 150 percent of their annual salary. Compare that with the average Dallas merit increase of \$600 to \$1,000. Granted, Dallas currently has an advantage that with so many employees close to retirement, none are going to move to another company... However in the next few years much of that advantage will swing the other way as we have more and more employees who are not vested, or are so far from retirement that they see no problem with jumping to another company.

Grapevine is now shooting for increasing the salaries of half of their workers to salaries that are closer to the middle range of the surrounding communities.

Sadly, the last report Dallas did congratulated itself that we were above local salary minimums on many of our jobs. So, still some work to do there.

Did you know that you can download the city council meeting tapes from the internet now? <http://www.ci.dallas.tx.us/cso/audio.shtml>

Numbers Disputed - Prior to her Health Benefit Cost misstatements to council last month, Ms. Suhm tried to dispute earlier statements by the Steelworkers that the 2005 HMO increases impacted almost 25% of the city employees. Which is pretty strange since that number came from her HR department. Ms. Suhm apparent rationale for disputing this is that the city no longer has 25% of its employees enrolled in the HMO plan.

Well no duh. The city use to have almost 25% of its employees in the plan in 2004. The HMO rate increase for 2005 was between 35 to 65 percent, so a number of them dropped out of the HMO plan and took the lesser insurance PPO plan. **Newsflash!** Just because the number of people signing up for the HMO plan in 2005 decreased, that does not change the fact that almost 25% of the employees were affected by the increase in costs. The employees who could no longer afford the HMO were still impacted, so the number impacted did not change and is not open to dispute.

Everyone's a Primary Drivers? – The Water Department Southside Waste treatment plant came up with a novel idea recently. They sent out a memo out informing all their employees (except for a few clerks) that they were going to be re-classified as Primary Drivers.

There is some disagreement as to the why. Some claim it was to make all the operators subject to mandatory random drug testing with out a supervisor actually having to claim reasonable cause.... others claim it was because someone made a mistake interpreting the city rules and decided that there was no difference between the operation of wastewater machinery and motor vehicle machinery. (??!??) But what ever the real reason, the attempted switch was wrong, and would have put the older operators at risk of losing their jobs due to not being able to pass a 'Driver Physical'.

A quick grievance with HR and a Freedom of information request to the City Secretary by one of our Steelworker members, along with a few words in the ear of the new water department manager Jody Puckett managed to derail the entire thing in very short order. This instance, illustrates perfectly how taking prompt action can keep an ill-considered decision from becoming bad policy.

Frequently Asked Questions about joining the Steelworkers

How much does it cost to join the Steelworkers? - It is very inexpensive. The maximum it can be is \$5.00 a week, and depending on income, lots of people contribute less. The dues structure is spelled out in the bylaws here at cityofdallasemployees.com look under bylaws

How come the dues are not listed on the enrollment card? - This card was put together and approved by the City Attorney's office. And only the stuff that they approved could be put on it prior to printing. So that was not allowed on the card. You would have liked the dues structure on the card, the City Controllers office wanted the employee number and not the social security number on it, and the Steelworkers would have liked a space for email addresses on them. But we were required to print the card that they approved. We have since been able to use a stamp to slip in the employee number and the email address at the edge of the card.

Does it really matter if I join? – YES!

It is only through a collective voice in the workplace that civilian employees can have a real impact. Non-members are going to be DEPENDING on members to fight against future cuts or for increases. Is that fair? Not really. It's like expecting your co-worker to fill up your gas tank once a month. Skeptical about the benefits of Association membership? Look at all the stuff that the Dallas Police Association has been able to get for it's members. They are a prime example of the benefits of having a large association working towards the long haul on issues that concern them.

Strength in Numbers - As a Steelworker you have power in numbers. There are Steelworkers - AFL-CIO members all over the city and state who are not city employees. As a Steelworker we can call upon them when assistance is needed on the local level. We also have an the Regional and International Office, staffed with various professionals who can assist us when the problem is more than a local union can handle. **Ask yourself - Are things ever going to improve if I do nothing?**



The AFL-CIO has done more good for more people than any group in America in its legislative efforts. It doesn't just try to do something about wages and hours for its own people. No group in the country works harder in the interests of everyone. - President Lyndon Johnson, 1965

North Texas Association of Public Employees
Steelworkers Local #9479
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Dallas, Texas 75219



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If you would like to join the Steelworkers please fill the card below. After filling out the card, fold the card so that your filled out card is on the inside and the Steelworkers Address is on the outside. Secure the bottom with tape, affix a stamp and mail it to us at North Texas Association of Public Employees Steelworkers, Local 9479, 3626 N. Hall Street - Suite 411, Dallas, Texas 75219 - **Or just Fax it to 214-760-7423**

AUTHORIZATION FOR REPRESENTATION AND PAYROLL DEDUCTION

North Texas Association of Public Employees -An Affiliate of United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union, AFL-CIO, CLC

I hereby request and accept membership in the North Texas Association of Public Employees—an affiliate of the United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union, AFL-CIO, CLC ("NTAPE/USW"), and I hereby authorize and designate the USW to act as my Representative for purposes of presenting grievances concerning my wages, hours of work, and other working conditions and terms of employment.

I further authorize and request my employer to deduct from my earnings 1% per pay period, not to exceed \$20 per month, which represents my membership dues to, said organization. The amount is to be transmitted to the International Secretary/Treasurer of the USW. This authorization shall remain in effect until further notice from me in writing or upon termination of my employment.

First Name _____ Middle Initial _____ Last Name _____
Address _____ Apt# _____ City _____
State _____ Zip Code _____ Home Tel. # _____
Work Tel. # _____ Cell Tel # _____
Job Title _____ Department _____
Employee # _____ Personal Email: _____
Employee Signature _____ Date _____

North Texas Association of Public Employees
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Attention City Employees Family Members - Please do not discard City Charter Proposition and Health Benefit Info Inside