



**SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY**  
2015 - 2016

**SOLANO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT CITIZEN COMPLAINT PROCEDURES**

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2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury

**I. SUMMARY**

The 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury elected to conduct an investigation of the Solano County Department of Resource Management Environmental Health Services Division to gain a better understanding of the Division's citizen complaint process and its confidentiality policy.

Environmental Health Services is responsible for a variety of programs and services designed to improve and protect the public health and the environment of Solano County.

A particular strength of these programs is that Solano County residents have a voice in the effectiveness of the Division's services by means of a citizens' complaint process. Citizen complaints are an invaluable method of checks and balances to ensure local government agencies are working in the public's and the environment's best interest.

**II. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

The Environmental Health Services Division is responsible for the management of three major programs. The policies and procedures for the following three programs are defined in the manual used by the Solano County Department of Resource Management.

- The Consumer Protection Program provides services to protect the health of Solano County residents through The Food Program, Recreational Health, Tattooing, Body Piercing and Permanent Cosmetics, and the Childhood Lead Program.
- The Technical Services Program provides assistance to the public in the planning and implementation of Small Water Systems, Wells and On-Site Sewage Disposal, Solid Waste Management, and the Housing and Vector Program.
- The Hazardous Materials Program manages the Hazardous Materials/Waste Program, and Site Mitigation Programs.

During the Grand Jury's investigation, it was discovered that the Complaint Investigation Records section of the Policies and Procedures Manual (Manual) is decidedly outdated. The records section outlines the administrative procedures for receiving, investigating and filing citizen complaints. It provides steps for processing complaints received by telephone

only. There are no instructions for processing complaints received in person, via electronic mail, postal service, or by the Division's on-line complaint form.

The Manual does not address the procedures for entering complaints into the Division's Statewide Environmental Evaluation Planning System (SWEEPS), a computer software program designed for environmental health agencies to electronically track and store complaint and code enforcement details. The Grand Jury discovered that administrative staff and field specialists are working independently of the Complaint Investigation Records section of the Manual. The Manual has led to differences in understanding how complaints are received and processed, and whether or not specialists are responsible for entering complaints into SWEEPS when they are received while in the field.

Apart from the complaint process, the Grand Jury found the Division's Complaint Investigation Records, Consumer Protection, and Technical Services sections of the Manual do not include a policy on field inspector recusal. A recusal policy would require field specialists to disqualify themselves from investigating complaints when they have personal knowledge of, or an interest in, an establishment or entity under investigation.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

- Interviewed management and staff from various units within Resource Management and the Environmental Health Services Division
- Reviewed Administrative Policies and Procedures for receiving, investigating, and filing Complaint Investigation Records
- Reviewed Consumer Protection Policies and Procedures
- Reviewed Technical Services Policies and Procedures

### **IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS**

The outdated Complaint Investigation Records section of the Manual identifies the Solano County Department of Resource Management by its former name: Solano County Department of Environmental Management. The name change occurred in 2004.

During its interviews, the Grand Jury found Environmental Health Services does not have a requirement for systematically reviewing and updating the Manual to ensure consistency in the Division's operations or to reflect changes in environmental laws, regulations, and advancements in information technology which affect how the Division performs its required services.

As of the writing of this report, the 2015-2016 Grand Jury found the most current effective date of the Division's Complaint Investigation Records section of the Manual is April 29, 1993. The section describes the process to follow when complaints are received by telephone. The Grand Jury found no procedures for processing complaints received in person, via electronic mail, postal service, or by the Division's on-line complaint form.

The Grand Jury also found it does not address computer technology or the SWEEPS program that is being used to record complaints. The Grand Jury discovered inconsistencies in understanding who in addition to the Administrative staff, is responsible for entering complaints into SWEEPS. During the interviews the Grand Jury found there is no clear understanding of procedures and persons responsible for entering complaints into SWEEPS.

The Division's Complaint Investigation Records, Consumer Protection, and Technical Services sections of the Manual do not include policy on field inspector recusal. A recusal policy would require field specialists to disqualify themselves from investigating complaints.

## **V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Finding 1 –**

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury found the current Complaint Investigation Records section of the Policies and Procedures Manual (Manual) outlines procedures for processing complaints that are received by telephone.

### **Recommendation 1 –**

Update the Manual to include procedures for receiving complaints delivered in person, via electronic mail, postal service, and the Division's on-line complaint form.

### **Finding 2 –**

There is no clear understanding of procedures or person(s) responsible for entering complaints into the Statewide Environmental Evaluation Planning System (SWEEPS).

### **Recommendation 2 –**

Update the Manual to clearly identify which Division personnel are responsible for entering complaints into SWEEPS.

### **Finding 3 –**

There are no procedures in place for entering complaints received directly by specialists while in the field.

**Recommendation 3 –**

Update the Manual to clarify how field specialists should enter complaints into SWEEPS when received in the field.

**Finding 4 –**

There is a lack of clarity regarding which Division personnel have access to various SWEEPS modules, and who can edit data.

**Recommendation 4 –**

Update the Manual to identify who has access to SWEEPS, its various modules, and who has the authority to edit data.

**Finding 5 –**

The Division does not have a system in place that requires routine review and updating of its Manual to ensure it reflects changes in environmental laws, operational procedures, and information technology.

**Recommendation 5 –**

The Grand Jury recommends a review of all policies and procedures on a routine basis, not to exceed three years, to ensure Division compliance with changes in environmental laws and information technology, which could affect its services. It is also recommended staff be trained on a regular basis for consistency in following procedures.

**Finding 6 –**

There is no formal recusal policy for field inspectors.

**Recommendation 6 –**

The Manual should include a section on recusal.

**COMMENTS**

During our investigation, the Grand Jury found Environmental Health Services provides essential and important services to the residents of Solano County. We also found the management and staff of the Division are professional and efficient in their respective positions. The Grand Jury believes with routine updates of its Policies and Procedures Manual, the Division will become a more efficient governmental agency.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Director, Solano County Department of Resource Management

**COURTESY COPIES**

Clerk, Solano County Board of Supervisors  
Solano County Administrator