



Statement of the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor Regarding the Commission's 2010 Revitalization Efforts

Last week, in response to an inquiry by the New York Daily News regarding a two-day training session in December 2010 on improving performance evaluations, the Commission issued the following statement:

“. . . [T]his was a big week for the Waterfront Commission. On Wednesday . . . the Commission had just participated in major takedown of a drug ring that was selling oxycodone to longshoremen who were operating heavy machinery on the docks while high on narcotics. This is particularly critical in light of the NYSA and ILA's ongoing efforts to block the Commission's enforcement actions to remove drug dealers and users from the docks. And yesterday, a federal judge refused to grant the request of the ILA and NYSA to stop our effort to diversify the docks. Both involve major issues affecting the economy of the Port and the City of New York, yet were not covered by the Daily News. [The Commission is] frankly a little perplexed that you would consider the meeting - which occurred three years ago - to be newsworthy. But if you want to focus on that instead of this week's big events, the following is our statement:

As you may recall, in 2009 the NYS Inspector General's Report found that many of the new hires in the Commission's Police Division were recent college graduates with no prior law enforcement experience. That report found that those new detectives received inadequate training, and were not provided with necessary policies and procedures. In the Commission's response, we reported the wide-sweeping changes made to the Police Division, including the addition of numerous experienced detectives and sergeants whose qualifications were numerous and outstanding. As part of the Commission's ongoing process to revitalize its divisions, we held a two-day training session in December 2010, for the purposes of providing our Police Division top brass with necessary training and support in shaping the performance of the detectives that they supervised. This was particularly important since we evaluate each supervisor on his or her ability to properly evaluate and provide instructive guidance to their subordinates, and we therefore had an obligation to train them to do so.

It is well recognized that over-inflation in performance evaluations is a common occurrence in every workplace, one that must be corrected. During those sessions, we discussed the recent performance evaluations and noted that the overall distribution reflected unrealistic positive ratings. We attributed this to the fact that the Commission's organizational priorities had changed, and that what was acceptable and had defined excellence in the past (prior to the IG's report) no longer reflected the new administration's expectations.

Supervisors were encouraged to emphasize the positive when providing feedback to employees, but not to ignore performance shortfalls. We explained that ratings had to be accurate in order for the Commission to distinguish and recognize employees who make truly significant contributions. We emphasized that if everyone received an "exceeded expectations," rating, then that rating would become ineffective, and we would lose our ability to measure, reward and shape performance. The comment regarding detectives that should have gone into some other kind of work was a reflection of the [New York State Inspector General's] findings the prior year. One of the purposes of the review session was to determine whether performance ratings were supported by the data or were inflated and required appropriate adjustment. For those employees who either fell below, or exceeded expectations, each supervisor was required to presents data concerning actual performance. During that meeting we asked many questions to assure their clear understanding of what was expected of the highly rated employees and what they delivered. As the recording will reflect, we did not provide directions pertaining to specific employees' ratings but instead, left this decision to each supervisor.

Notably, there has been significant turnover of the Police Division since then, with several inexperienced detectives leaving, and one detective being dismissed for cause. Several of those supervisors who were present in that December 2010 meeting are no longer employed by the Commission. In addition, John Hennelly has retired as Police Chief.

. . . in the last couple of years we have made some great progress in repairing the relationship between the Daily News and the Waterfront Commission . . . [The Commission is] providing you with this statement in good faith, sincerely hoping that it will not be skewed for the purposes of providing a sensational but unsubstantiated story.”

The Commissioners of New York and New Jersey fully support the ongoing efforts of the Executive Director and his staff to ensure fair and accurate performance evaluations of all Commission employees.