

## Resource Management Agency Response

### VENTURA COUNTY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AGENCY: CUSTOMER RELATIONS

#### Findings & Conclusions

**F-01:** The RMA staff does not receive formal training in customer service or public relations.

**Do Not Concur:** The RMA provides a number of training opportunities and has recently initiated formal customer service training by an outside firm specializing in that field. See response to F-02 for more details.

**F-02.** The customer relations program for the RMA consists of:

- Mission Statement
- Web site
- Public Opinion forms [Att. 1-3]
- Several Municipal Advisory Committees in the Planning Division

**Do Not Concur:** This finding does not include references to all training activities, and mischaracterizes the role of the Municipal Advisory Committees. All new RMA employees are field trained by veteran employees prior to conducting business with the public with no supervision. In addition, the Building and Safety Division conducts an annual inspection follow-up/Ride-Along program where our Senior Inspection and Enforcement Staff will either follow up after an inspector has visited a site or will ride-along with the inspector on a route. They will visit with the contractor or homeowner and seek information on how they perceived the inspection conducted by our staff. The purpose of this program is to both ensure that our field staff is conducting the county's business in a manner that reflects positively on the Division but also to ensure they are accurate and consistent in their inspection procedures.

Also, all employees in RMA are encouraged to attend County-sponsored training classes (such as "Real Colors" and "Verbal Judo – Tactical Communication Strategies"). Within the Environmental Health Division, where budgetary constraints have been fewer, employees have also been sent to training conducted by outside firms, such as *Public Service Excellence*. Finally, RMA just recently sponsored its first agency-wide training by an outside firm ("How to Deliver Exceptional Customer Service" by *Fred Pryor Seminars*).

Moreover, the standards for customer service are indicated in the agency's employee performance evaluations. Every employee in RMA is rated against the defined standards of "Public Relations". Employees must meet a minimum standard of "Meets Expectations", which denotes that they do an adequate job of assisting customers in terms of both attitude and knowledge of relevant

codes/issues.

Finally, the Planning Division does not operate the Municipal Advisory Committees (MAC). And to the extent that any division within RMA interacts with the MACs, it is as a forum for public input into the projects, processes and policies of the County, and not as a "customer relations program."

**F-03:** Public Opinion forms measuring customer satisfaction are used by all divisions with the exception of Weights and Measures [Att. 1-3]

**Concur:** Agreed. Efforts are currently underway to implement a program within Weights & Measures to seek and track customer service-related opinions.

**F-04:** The Weights and Measures Division maintains its own method for receiving, logging, and tracking customer complaints.

**Concur.** Agreed.

**F-05:** The Agency Director reviews monthly summaries of all Public Opinion Forms received.

**Concur.** Agreed.

**F-06:** There is no performance standard related to customer service for any of the four divisions having public contact. Service-related complaints re resolved informally (generally over the telephone) by the Building Official, a Division Deputy Director, or a Program Manager.

**Do Not Concur:** This mischaracterizes RMA's customer service standards. As articulated in its Mission Statement, the RMA's service standard is that all customers are to be treated honestly, fairly and efficiently. Thus, every single service complaint is followed-up on and, when validated, the employee in question is appropriately counseled. While most service complaints are handled "informally," where a valid service complaint raises serious issues, it is considered a personnel issue and handled through the formal personnel/disciplinary process.

Also, as noted in the response to F-02 above, the standards for customer service are indicated in the employee performance evaluations for every employee within RMA.

**F-07:** There are no RMA appeal processes for service complaints. The public's only recourse is to appeal to the BOS or file a complaint with the Grand Jury.

**Do Not Concur:** The inappropriate use of the term "appeal" leads to a

mischaracterization of the complaint resolution process within RMA. Service complaints are typically handled by the immediate supervisor or manager. Where needed, they are elevated to the Division Director and on occasion to the RMA Director. In the rare instances where the matter is not resolved entirely within RMA, complainants can bring their concerns to the CEO's Office or directly to the Board of Supervisors. In no case are service complaints filed as "appeals" nor are they treated as "appeals"; rather, they are treated as personnel issues and are handled as such.

**F-08:** Public telephone customer complaints are not logged.

**Concur.** Agreed.

**F-09:** The RMA Deputy Directors and Program Managers are responsible for public opinion record keeping in their division.

**Concur:** Agreed, but as noted in F-05, the Agency Director also maintains a log and tracks written complaints and responses.

**F-10:** Public Opinion Forms are not pre-numbered or date stamped [Att. 1-3]

**Concur:** Agreed. While Public Opinion Forms are not "date stamped", the forms do have a place for a date to be entered by the customer. Also, the Public Opinion Forms are collected weekly and dated by the management assistant prior forwarding them on to the division heads. Moreover, each Public Opinion Form is logged by month for reporting purposes.

**F-11:** The number of customers visiting each Division is not consistently tracked.

**Partially Concur:** Agree in part. The Planning and Environmental Health Divisions have sign-in sheets at their public counters which allow tracking of customer visits. However, these represent only a portion of the public contacts made by RMA employees on a daily basis. While workload reviews could be used to estimate all contacts with the public, such a detailed estimate has never been made.

### **Conclusions:**

**C-01:** The RMA does not provide staff with customer relations training. (F-01)

**Response:** See response to F-01 above.

**C-02.** The RMA does not have a customer relations program (F-02 through F-04, F-6, through F-09, F-11, F-12)

**Response:** See responses to F-02, F-06 and F-09 above.

**C-03.** The RMA has no performance standards or benchmarks for improving customer relations (F-06 through F-12)

**Response** See response to F06 above.

**C-04.** The RMA is unable to determine how many customers complain by telephone since calls are not log (F-09- F-12)

**Response:** Agreed.

### **Recommendations**

**R-01.** The RMA should develop and implement a customer relations program (C-01 through C-04)

**Response:** The RMA currently has in place a number of procedures and programmatic efforts directed toward maintaining and where possible improving our customer service. RMA actively solicits feedback from its customers by making survey forms available at our public counters, through the distribution of customer surveys to customers (both in the field and via U.S. Mail) at the conclusion of their permitting process, and through our web pages. Procedures are in place to track and ensure that RMA management follows up on all negative and, where appropriate, positive comments.

Within each of the RMA Divisions there are both informal and formal training opportunities for new and long-term employees. New employees are trained both in the office and in the field by supervisory staff prior to their being sent out into the field or placed at the public counter. Also, all employees are offered and encouraged to attend customer service training classes provided by the County Human Resources Department.

Finally, both within the Agency and at the Division level, efforts are made to provide customer service training on a periodic basis as budget will allow. The RMA recently held its first Agency-wide training by an outside training firm. The training was well-received and helpful, and RMA intends to schedule further training (perhaps annually) as budget allows.

All of these policies, procedures and activities, if packaged into a single document, would perhaps constitute the "customer relations program" referred to

in this recommendation. If that is the intent of the recommendation, it is unclear what direct benefit such an action would have on actual customer service. Therefore, it is not recommended that RMA devote its limited resources to preparing and maintaining such a program document. Instead, it is recommended by the Board that RMA continue to solicit customer feedback, closely track customer responses and complaints, and provide focused counsel and training to the greatest extent possible as budget allows.

**R-02.** An RMA customer relations program should include customer relations training for all staff. (C-01, C-03, C-04)

**Response:** See response to R-01 above.

**R-03:** RMA should establish performance standards and submit quarterly progress reports to the County Executive Officer. (C-03)

**Response:** As noted in the response to Finding F-06, the RMA has an established "performance standard": every customer is to receive honest, fair and efficient customer service and those performance standards are specifically defined and rated in the agency's performance evaluations, per F-06. Our procedures call for supervisors and managers to follow up on every customer service complaint we receive and to take action.

The RMA does currently log all complaints and follow-up actions taken; that information is provided on a monthly basis to the Agency Director. Beginning immediately, that information will also be provided to the County Executive Officer, to the extent allowed by the County's personnel rules and regulations and the current MOA.