

Standing Tall for Ethical Behavior

Caltrans Program Stresses Employee Awareness, Offers Advice and Training

Caltrans is committed to accountability and transparency on the part of its work force and in its actions, and makes high ethical standards a priority in its 2015-2020 Strategic Management Plan.

Caltrans encourages employees to report any ethical dilemma or questionable behavior they may encounter. For several years, Caltrans' Ethics Program has offered a range of services to employees, from reporting a situation they're uncomfortable with to training sessions that reinforce personal and professional integrity.

Caltrans formalized its ethics awareness procedures as part of establishing an Office of Risk Management in 2014. A multi-faceted program was then developed. Today it offers:

- A 24-hour, multilingual help line for all employees. It's accessible by toll-free phone or online, and is staffed by a specialist vendor contracted by Caltrans.
- An "Ask Ethics" email address where employees can seek guidance on ethical issues in the workplace, or pose questions about situations.
- An online information page where employees can learn about ethics training classes, report questionable situations, or review policies on subjects that can generate complaints.

The help line has received 898 complaints from September 2014, when the service began, through the end of December 2017. A total of 864 complaints, or 96 percent, of the complaints have been closed.

Complaints ranged from harassment, disruptive behavior, and human resources-related issues (i.e. hiring, merit issues, promotions, or perceived favoritism) to alleged instances of fraud, conflict of interest, or misuse of state resources involving time, vehicles or equipment.

Each complaint or inquiry is considered on a case-by-case basis. Complaints alleging more serious violations are investigated and may result in a more formal probe.



As part of its Ethics Program, Caltrans developed an information webpage and a help line for employees with questions or concerns.

The Ethics Program is now part of Caltrans' newly established Independent Office of Audits and Investigations, which was created by the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (Senate Bill 1) and is led by the Inspector General. The Inspector General will report to the Governor, Legislature, and California Transportation Commission at least annually and is charged with ensuring Caltrans and outside entities that receive state and federal transportation funds are spending that money efficiently.

Caltrans takes its pledge of transparency and high ethical behavior very seriously. In its 2015-20 Strategic Management Plan (SMP), the Department lists ethics and risk management as one of the key ways of achieving organizational excellence.

A performance target was established in the SMP that calls for a 5 percent annual increase in the number of employee survey respondents who say they're aware Caltrans makes available ways to report incidents of unethical behavior. In 2015, 79 percent of those responding answered positively. The rate rose to 81 percent in 2016, and 84 percent last year. **MM**

Source: Independent Office of Audits and Investigations