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## Culture

### Fire Dept to Investigate 'Gay Pride' Parade Sexual Harassment Claims

By Nathan Burchfiel  
CNSNews.com Staff Writer  
August 07, 2007

(CNSNews.com) - San Diego's openly lesbian fire chief said Tuesday she has apologized to four firefighters who claimed they were ordered to participate in the city's "Gay Pride" Parade and subjected to harassment along the parade route. She also announced an internal investigation into the allegations.

As [Cybercast News Service](#) previously reported, a Christian legal organization on Monday announced plans to sue the city on behalf of the four firefighters who said they were subjected to "vile sexual taunts from homosexuals lining the parade route" during the city's annual Pride Parade. The firefighters said they were ordered to participate in the parade against their wishes.

The firemen have filed "right-to-sue" requests with the city, an administrative procedure that waives their right to pursue an internal investigation of their complaints. Once they receive the right-to-sue notices, the firemen plan to file a sexual harassment lawsuit with legal aid provided by the Thomas More Law Center.

In a statement Tuesday, Fire Chief Tracy Jarman said she will "initiate a fact-finding investigation" to be conducted by the city's Equal Employment Investigative Officer.

"[W]e're working toward solutions to avoid this situation in the future," Jarman said, announcing she has met with the offended firemen and apologized to them.

Jarman did not directly address allegations that the firemen were ordered to participate in the parade after voicing their discomfort with it.

However, she pointed out that the department "has an established tradition of accepting invitations from diverse community groups and organizations to march in their parades, attend street festivals, and participate in school fire safety forums."

She did not say whether participation in other parades was mandatory. But she noted that the fire department participates in the Martin Luther

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King Jr. Day Parade, Cesar Chavez Day Parade, Patriots Day in Serra Mesa and four different 4th of July Parades. The department has participated in the Pride Parade for 15 years.

"This is the first time, to the best of my knowledge, that a sexual harassment complaint has been alleged, by crews, during the participating in a parade or festival," Jarman said. "I believe it's important to investigate this complaint, and if something inappropriate did happen, we will address it."

Sterling Stires, an attorney for the firemen, told **Cybercast News Service** that at least one complaint was filed after the 2006 parade. The complaint says a station "has been receiving sexually explicit brochures since participating in the Gay Pride Parade" in 2006.

The complaint, which came in an inter-department communication from Capt. Lynda Lynch to a supervisor identified as R. Zepeda, said crew members reported receiving "cat calls" during the parade and complained that the crew "has been required to participate."

The firemen involved in the pending lawsuit - Capt. John Giotto, Engineer Jason Hewett, Firefighter Chad Allison and Firefighter Alex Kane - could not be reached for comment on their meeting with Jarman.

Brian Rooney, a spokesman for the Thomas More Law Center, confirmed to **Cybercast News Service** that Jarman met with the firemen last week but said they "didn't perceive anything to be an apology."

As for the internal investigation Jarman is launching, Rooney said she "can do whatever she wants as far as the internal policing of her fire department, I'd imagine." But he said plans to sue the city are still on track. "The damage is already done, so to speak."

"These guys were made to endure three hours of the most vile types of sexual harassment that you can imagine," Rooney said. Their allegations are outlined in pages of complaints filed along with their [right-to-sue requests](#). (Warning: Graphic Content)

Rooney said the firefighters will seek financial damages in their lawsuit against the city. But he declined to elaborate because final plans for the complaint have not been made.

Maria Velasquez, a spokeswoman for City Attorney Michael Aguirre, told **Cybercast News Service** the office had no comment on the case, because it hasn't received notice of a lawsuit yet. The Department of Fair Employment and Housing must process the right-to-sue requests before a lawsuit can be filed against the city.

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