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Fire Chief Addresses Firefighter Allegations

Female Firefighter Sues Department Over Alleged Sexual Harassment

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- The smoldering controversy burning through the Sacramento City Fire Department is heating up again, as the department's top brass is demanding a thorough investigation.

Allegations of a sexual assault by an on-duty firefighter is now sparking radical change from the top down and allegations that the problem has been going on for some time.

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Sacramento City Fire Chief Julius Cherry held a press conference Thursday to address the allegations.

"I am terribly disappointed in the actions of some members of our organization as it relates to these allegations," Cherry said.

Six of Station No. 20's firefighters have been suspended on administrative leave for attending the Porn Star Costume Ball at Sacramento's Radisson Hotel Friday night, which is where an alleged sexual assault took place.



Cherry said that logs show Engine 20 was out of position and did not respond to an emergency medical call at 11:15 p.m. Friday, but that the ambulance unit at Station 20 did respond on time.

"Our department is very shaken by this incident. Members of our organization who don't deserve to be smeared with this brush have been smeared with it. Many of them have their head down. I have great concern for those people," Cherry said.

The chief outlined numerous administrative actions, including a new citizens' hot line -- (916) 433-

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1625.

"I encourage citizens to call to report any inappropriate behavior that they believe has occurred or is occurring by a member of the Sacramento Fire Department," Cherry said.

Fire department allegations include:

- A sexual assault
- Possible misuse of equipment and personnel at the Radisson Hotel
- Cruising fire trucks at bars and clubs to give joyrides to women
- A sexual harassment lawsuit by a female firefighter at Station No. 6

Regarding the latest misconduct allegations, the attorney handling the Station 6 lawsuit, Wendy York, said she "was not surprised and, in fact, I expected this."

The lawsuit alleges that the female firefighter was severely harassed by a small group Station No. 6 called "The Orangemen." They reportedly belong to a national group called FOOLS -- the Fraternal Organization Of Leatherheads.

"It's an organization that's steeped in tradition. And they have a reputation of being very exclusionary, almost cult-like and gang-like," York said.

The FOOLS Web site lists almost 50 Sacramento firefighters as members.

The Orangemen and FOOLS organizations are not illegal groups.

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