

Communication Services
5334 South Prince Street
Littleton, Colorado 80166-0001
Phone: 303-795-4630
Fax: 303-738-7894
www.co.arapahoe.co.us

For release: March 17, 2006

Contact:

ANDREA RASIZER

Communication Services Director

Direct: 303-795-4284

Mobile: 303-882-1909

E-mail: arasizer@co.arapahoe.co.us

Arapahoe County concludes investigation into Road and Bridge conflict

LITTLETON, CO --- On Friday, Arapahoe County concluded its investigation into the conflict in the Road and Bridge division and found evidence that there are racial tensions among employees.

Arapahoe County hired Mountain States Employers Council, an organization experienced in employment matters, to conduct two independent investigations to help the County understand the situation in Road and Bridge, a 71-employee division of the Public Works and Development department.

The investigation began March 6 after four Road and Bridge employees filed formal complaints about disruptive behavior in the workplace; and Mike Gray, a heavy duty equipment operator, notified the County that he objected to a Nov. 10, 2005 memo from his supervisor that directed him to completely cover up his landscape business sign and to stop wearing his border patrol hat to work.

The Board of County Commissioners feels very strongly that employees' freedom of speech must be protected. The Board, which does not normally get involved or comment on staff level personnel matters, had not seen the memo to Mr. Gray until it was released to the news media by Mr. Gray. After reviewing the memo, the Board of County Commissioners was extremely concerned about the freedom of speech issues. But, after reviewing the Mountain States reports, the Board feels strongly the memo was not meant to infringe on Mr. Gray's freedom of speech, but rather was an attempt to address and diffuse the problems in the Road and Bridge division.

"Arapahoe County strongly supports our employees' freedom of speech and to express their patriotism, including displaying the American flag," said Commissioner Rod Bockenfeld, who serves as chair of the Board. "But, as an employer we are committed to maintaining a positive work environment that is free of harassment and is sensitive to the diversity of our employees. County employees should be able to express their opinions, and they also should be able to work in an environment that is free from harassing, intimidating, hostile or offensive behavior."

According to the report, which was released Friday:

- Several employees reported they overheard racial comments made on CB radios by Road and Bridge employees.
- Several employees reported they had overheard racial comments made at work.
- Several employees reported that they felt intimidated by other employees while waiting for daily assignments in the lounge area of the Road and Bridge shop.

Any inappropriate interactions and derogatory comments that are offensive and hostile to any Road and Bridge employees will not be tolerated and must be corrected. The Board of County Commissioners has directed Human Resources to work with the managers and supervisors in the Road and Bridge division to address the issues in the report.

Human Resources will continue working with Mountain States Employers Council to develop recommendations that will ease tensions in the Road and Bridge division, which are expected to include mandatory diversity, sensitivity and supervisory training.

We are confident that the conflict that now exists among employees in the Road and Bridge division can be resolved in a way that protects the rights of all our employees.

* * *