



Seattle Police Department Policy Manual



1.020 – Chain of Command

Effective Date: 07/01/2016

1.020-POL

This policy applies to all employees.

1. Department Employees Follow a Structured Chain of Command

All Department employees are subordinate to the Chief of Police. Employees are subordinate to all ranks above their position.

The Department chain of command applies while on duty or during secondary employment.

Sworn Employees are ranked:

- Chief of Police
- Deputy Chief
- Assistant Chief
- Captain
- Lieutenant
- Sergeant
- Officer/Detective

The Chief of Police is the overall commander of the Department.

Deputy and Assistant chiefs command bureaus.

- Deputy and Assistant chiefs are appointed by the Chief of Police.
- An assistant chief may also establish a task force. A task force responds to a specific law enforcement problem. The assistant chief will determine the command, duration, reporting requirements and scope of the task force.

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Captains command sections and precincts.

- A section is a division of a bureau.
- A precinct is a geographical area of the city defined by boundaries.
- Precincts are geographically subdivided into sectors and beats. Sectors are a division of a precinct, and a beat is the division of a sector.

Lieutenants command units and watches.

- A unit is a division of a section. Several units may exist in one section.
- A watch is a set time of day when assigned personnel are on duty. A watch refers to a subcommand of a precinct.

Sergeants command squads and sectors.

- Squads are a division of a unit. Sectors are a division of a precinct. Several squads may exist in one unit. Sergeants may also command a detail, which is a subdivision of a squad or sector assigned a specific task.

Detectives are assigned to a squad or unit.

Patrol officers are assigned to a beat or a post.

- A beat is a geographical area defined within a precinct. A post is a fixed assignment within a precinct.

Non-sworn employees are ranked under their collective bargaining agreements.

2. The Department Follows a Succession of Command

If the Chief of Police is incapacitated, the Department command succession is:

- Deputy Chief
- Chief Operating Officer
- Patrol Operations Bureau Chief
- Special Operations Chief

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- Professional Standards Bureau Chief
- Criminal Investigations Bureau Chief

3. Sworn Employees Take Command During Operational Situations

Sworn employees responding to an operational situation will follow the command of a higher-ranking employee.

The physical presence of a higher ranking sworn employee at an operational scene indicates no immediate assumption of command and decision-making responsibilities.

4. Employees May Delegate Duties to Their Subordinates

An employee may assign a subordinate employee the same authority and responsibility they possess to accomplish a specific task. The delegating employee remains responsible to complete the delegated task.

5. Employees Train Their Subordinates

Employees in a supervisory role will provide training for their subordinate employees.

Subordinate employees will report the need for training to their supervisors.

Employees in a supervisory role will train their subordinate employees in the duties of that role if the supervisor cannot perform their duties.

(Also see manual section [1.070 – Training](#))

6. Officers Assigned as Acting Sergeants Receive Training

Captains will send officers to Department sergeant training for acting sergeant assignments over 60 consecutive days.

Captains will send officers to Department sergeant training prior to, or within 90 days of the start of the acting sergeant assignment lasting over 60 days.

7. Command Employees Take Responsibility for Every Aspect of Their Command

Employees in a supervisory role will coordinate and direct subordinates and allocate resources to achieve the operations objective.

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Employees in a supervisory role will perform the full range of administrative functions relying upon policy, direction, training, and personal initiative as a guide for themselves and their command in achieving the highest level of performance possible.

8. Employees Shall Communicate Through the Chain of Command

Exception: Where otherwise provided in this Manual, or where the information is sensitive and requires communication outside the chain of command, an employee may communicate directly with any higher-ranking employee. The higher-ranking employee is then responsible for taking action where appropriate and passing along the information.