

Sample City Animal Control Focus Group Report

1/9/01

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Background

What is a Focus Group?

A Focus Group is a means of capturing qualitative data, particularly about how people feel about a specific issue or object. It is difficult to quantify information from a focus group in any type statistical format. This is usually done with a follow-up written survey if desired. The Focus Group is a group of up to 15 people assembled in a room who conduct a discussion led by a facilitator. The facilitator captures the information from the participants in some manner. It is important that the facilitator be impartial, and not lead the opinions of the participant. The outcome is a list of Comments, usually assembled into meaningful groups that provide an indication of the feelings/opinions of the participants.

Location and Participants

Focus groups were held with Sample City Animal Control employees on May 5, 6 and 7 at the Santa Hablo office of the department. Each session lasted approximately one hour. The same facilitator led each group, and similar topics were discussed in each group. The groups varied in size from a low of 3 to a high of approximately 8.

Discussion Questions

Although the discussion in the groups varied somewhat, there was a list of consistent questions that was asked of all groups. These questions were asked in the following order.

1. “How do you feel about your jobs? Participants responded at random. Although an attempt was made to stimulate as much discussion as possible, no attempt was made to assure all participants responded.” This open-ended question allowed the participants to set the tone of the conversation with no prompting from the facilitator. This is the primary source of the Comments listed on the *Animal Control Focus Group Detailed Comments* matrix located in the Appendix of this report.

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2. “Thinking over the past 6 months to a year, what positive changes have taken place here?” In one focus group it was very difficult to get the participants to focus on the positive. They continued to revert to negative Comments concerning their work environment. This question was asked as an open-ended question for random response. Data are displayed in the exhibit labeled “Positive Changes” on Pages 12 and 13.
3. “Let’s pretend I am a Genie and you just found me on the beach. I come out of my bottle and inform you I can fix one, and only one thing in your workplace, what would you like fixed?” Each person was asked to respond to this question. Allowing only one response forces the participants to prioritize their desires. Data are displayed in the exhibit labeled “What I Would Like Fixed” on Pages 14 and 15.
4. “What are the priorities of the department?” This question was asked as an open-ended question with a random response. Employees had a difficult time separating their personal priorities from the department priorities. As a result of the responses received, it is the opinion of the facilitator that the department does not share any set of Councilon goals or priorities. Data are displayed in the exhibit labeled “Department Priorities” on Pages 16 and 17.
5. “Do you like coming to work?” This question was asked as an open-ended question with a random response. Every employee responded by saying they liked coming to work now, but did not as recently as November. This was due primarily to the change in the Director and the move to Rockledge. Since all answers were the same, there is no exhibit displaying these data.

In addition to the planned questions listed above, many clarifying questions were asked of each group depending on their response to the planned questions. These questions were used to gain specific information regarding Comments and to verify interpretation of their Comments.

Data Extraction

All 5 sessions were recorded on audiotape. Before each session a thorough explanation of the taping occurred covering the following topics.

1. The reason for the tape is to allow the facilitator to concentrate on the group and the necessary questioning, as opposed to taking copious notes. This will allow the facilitator to accurately extract their Comments at a later time for a report.
2. There is no intent for anyone other than the facilitator to listen to the tapes.
3. The tapes become public documents and could be solicited under the public information act.

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4. If there is a topic a participant feels uneasy about discussing on the tape, it will be turned off and notes taken for the duration of that discussion. A non-verbal sign was agreed upon that would have the tape turned off by the facilitator. This option was not used by any of the focus groups.

The tapes were reviewed and an attempt was made to capture each Comment from the tape. Comments made by multiple people were captured multiple times. Comments repeated by the same individual were only captured one time. Therefore the volume of Comments in the detailed report is somewhat representative of the volume of Comments in the focus groups. There can be some correlation made between the frequency of Comments and the interest of the employees in the topic.

The method used to assimilate the data is called the affinity process. The Comments are captured on self-stick removable notes as the audio tape is reviewed. After all Comments are captured, they are grouped on a wall into groups that have an affinity for each other. The groups are then named, thus producing the Comment Groups that appear on the detailed report. The Sub-Groups were created by performing an affinity process for each Comment Group where appropriate to further stratify each of the key issues in a particular Comment Group. There were no pre-determined Comment Groups.

Comments that appear in most or all focus groups can be determined to have a wide spread interest among the employees. Comments that appear in only a few groups can be determined to be more local in nature. These data can be reviewed on the exhibit labeled *Frequency of Responses by Focus Group* on Page 10 of this report. The volume of Comments within a focus group is not as much an indication of wide spread interest as the frequency between groups. Volume within a group is somewhat a factor of group discussion dynamics. Once a topic is started, many people will build on that topic. However topics that have wide spread interest will surface in many groups.

Non-Verbal Data

The emotion in the voices of the participants cannot be captured in the report, however some of the participants were very emotional in discussions about Council intervention, scheduling, safety and compensation structuring, especially the application of overtime hours to sick leave. This was particularly true in one focus group. There was generally much less negative emotion than has been found in other similar focus groups.

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Focus Group Labeling

The focus groups were labeled in the Detail Comment Sheet for the purposes of analysis. Due to the small number of sessions, and the segmentation of sessions, it would be easy to tell what groups of employees were in what session. Therefore no attempt was made to assign group numbers at random.

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Summary of Observations by the Facilitator

The following observations are in no particular order; only in the order the facilitator recalled them. They contain opinions and suggestions of the facilitator based on the discussions in the focus groups.

- In all groups the first answer, and most all other answers to the open-ended question, “How do you feel about your jobs?” was a very positive response. In the one case where the opening response was negative, it was quickly doused by many other positive Comments. This is some indication that most employees like their jobs. All sessions stated that they liked their jobs but not necessarily the way they had to do them. It is the facilitator’s opinion that incorporating employee suggestions into the work processes could make significant process improvements. However due to past culture, this must be approached in a very cautious manner.
- Every person in every group indicated that the new management was a significant improvement over past management. Even though this improvement was noted, there is still room for improvement in the methods used to solicit employee involvement in improving the work processes. It was noted by both management and workers that a gap exists here, frustrating both parties. Both parties would like to close the gap. Outside facilitation could help in closing this gap.
- All officers expressed deep concern regarding the present methods for handling off-hour work requirements. Some employees are beginning to question the legality of the present policies. Of all the concerns listed and suggestions made, this is by far the most important for the officers.
- Employees do not feel wanted and needed in the city. Not by the public, but in the city infrastructure. All groups expressed some concern that they are a stepchild without a home. This effects their perception of themselves, and I’m sure eventually the quality of the work they do. Some improvements have been made, such as the uniforms, but there is still more work to be done.
- The employees are very frustrated by the Council. They feel they are overworked and not able to handle priorities in a safe manner. This feeling is compounded by the redirecting of priorities by the Council due to citizen calls, often to non-priority and non-safety related tasks. The facilitator has had exposure to all city departments over the last 5 years. This feeling exists in all departments, but not to the degree it is in Animal Control.
- The employee groups generally get along well with each other with a few isolated exceptions. It is generally felt management has done a good job to facilitate this relationship by resolving situations with problem employees.

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- The employees like their present work surroundings. They have heard rumors of a move and are very concerned about that.
- Every employee, across all classifications, had a concern about the amount and duplication of paperwork. It is their opinion significant staffing could be freed up for field work by streamlining the paperwork and allocating the work to non-certified officers where possible.

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General Comment Information

One objective of the focus groups included solicitation of information regarding specific topics, Positive Changes, Areas for Improvement, and Department Priorities. These data are specifically detailed in this report beginning on Page 13.

Another objective was to determine what issues were on the minds of the employees and their relative importance to them. These are unsolicited issues. This information is shown in this report as General Comment Information. The follow pages include the following General Comment Information data:

1. Page 9 – Explanation of the Comment Groups and their codes
2. Page 10 – Summary of the frequency of responses shown by Comment Group. This bar chart is valuable in determining what issues are on the minds of employees. Typically the more frequently an issue is mentioned, the more important it is to them.
3. Page 11 – Frequency of responses by Focus Groups. This matrix allows the reader to examine what responses were consistent in all groups. These issues tend to be the issues that cut across all classifications of employees, in other words the most widespread. Issues that appear only in certain groups are likely issues affecting only certain job classifications.
4. Appendix – Shows each Comment as it was captured. There are two sets of matrices. The first is sorted by Comment Group to allow the reader to view the specific Comments by topic. The second is sorted by focus group to allow the reader to view the issues of each group, which are frequently different. They both contain exactly the same information sorted differently.

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General Comment Information Comment Groups and Sub-groups Explanation

Comment Group	Sub-Group	Description
Council	1	City Council issues
Comp	1	Pay
	2	Classifications
Disp	1	Dispatcher work distribution
	2	Dispatcher workload
	3	Dispatcher work quality
Emp Rel	1	Relationships among employees/employee groups
Logistics	1	Vehicle/travel
	2	Buildings
Mgt	1	Positive Comments regarding management behavior
	2	Negative Comments regarding management behavior
	3	Management experience/knowledge
Org	1	Department reporting
	2	Seniority/experience utilization
	3	Union
	4	Department structure
Paper	1	No pay for paperwork
	2	Too much paperwork
	3	Paperwork changes to be made
	4	Incorrect paperwork
Process	1	Suggestions to make work processes more efficient/effective
Resources	1	Short staff
	2	Short resources
	3	Other
Sched	1	On-call issues
	2	Staggered shifts
	3	Rotating areas
Safety	1	Job Safety
X-Trng	1	Training to understanding each others' jobs

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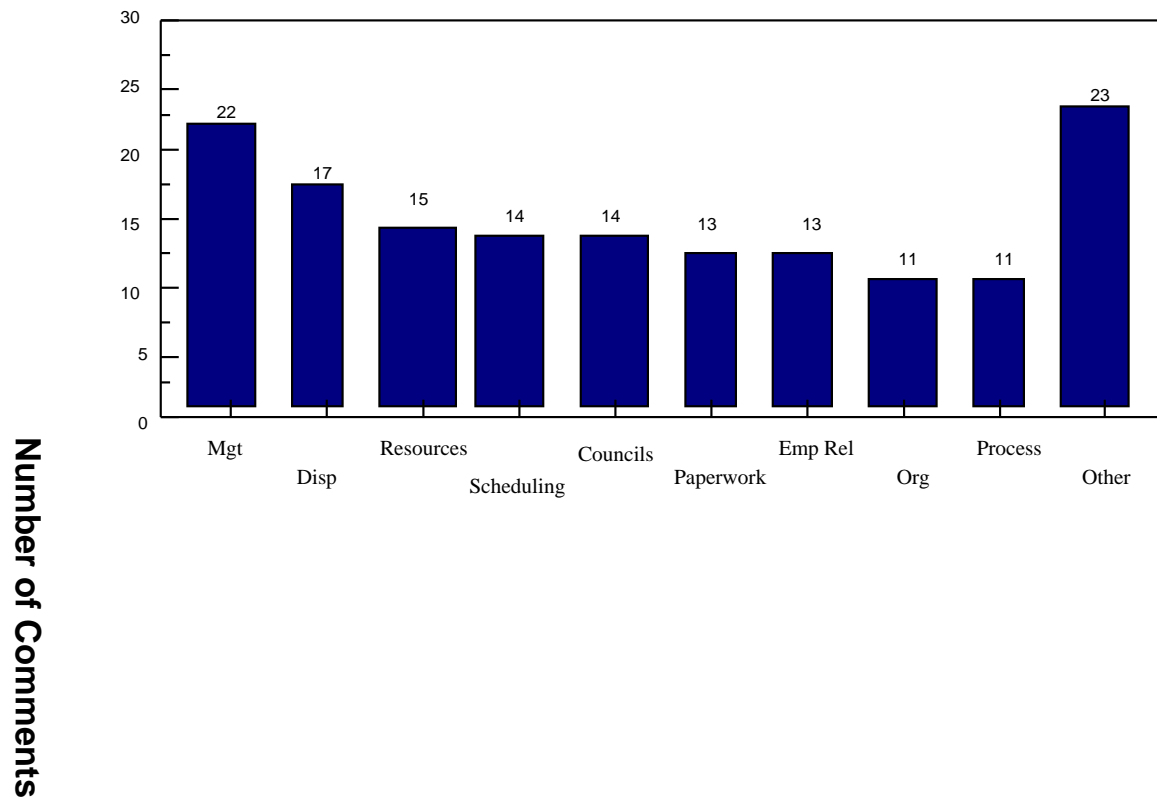
General Comment Information Summary of Frequency of Responses

Below is a summary of the number of responses of the general Comments listed by Comment Group. This chart is a reflection of the issues on the minds of employees, as they were not specifically solicited.

The responses from the specific questions related to Improvements, Fixes, and Priorities are shown in separate charts as responses regarding these topics were specifically solicited, therefore their frequency was not necessarily a reflection of topic interest. They are not included in these data.

General Comment Frequency Distribution

Listed by Comment Group
(Excludes "Improvement, Fixes, and Priorities")



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General Comment Information Frequency of Responses by Focus Group

Comment Group	Sub Group	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Total
Council	1	5	3	1	4	1	14
Compensation	1	0	1	2	2	0	5
	2	0	0	2	0	0	2
Dispatchers	1	4	2	0	1	0	7
	2	6	1	0	0	0	7
	3	0	0	0	3	0	3
Emp Rel	1	1	6	1	1	4	13
Logistics	1	1	0	3	1	0	5
	2	1	0	0	0	0	1
Mgt	1	2	3	0	1	1	7
	2	0	0	7	1	2	10
	3	1	2	2	0	0	5
Org	1	0	1	0	1	0	2
	2	0	0	1	4	0	5
	3	0	0	0	1	0	1
	4	0	0	1	2	0	3
Paper	1	0	0	2	0	0	2
	2	1	0	2	2	0	5
	3	0	0	0	2	0	2
	4	1	0	0	0	0	1
Process	1	2	4	3	2	0	11
Resources	1	3	1	3	1	0	8
	2	0	0	4	1	0	5
	3	0	0	2	0	0	2
Sched	1	0	1	6	2	0	9
	2	0	1	0	1	0	2
	3	0	0	0	3	0	3
Safety	1	0	0	0	2	1	3
X-Trng	1	3	1	0	2	1	7
Total		31	27	42	40	10	150

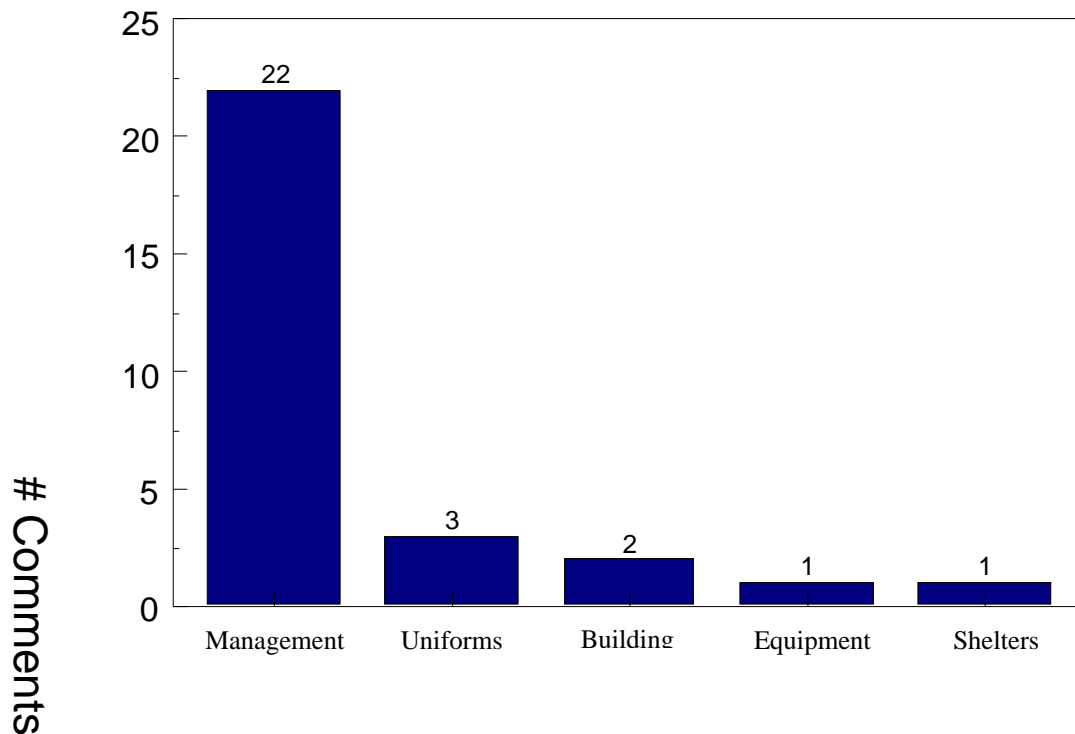
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Specific Comment Information

Below is a summary of the Comments received from the question, “Over the last 6 months, what has changed around here that has been positive?”

Positive Changes in Last 6-12 Months



Comment Group	Explanation
Management	Behavior of management toward employees
Uniforms	New uniforms
Building	Move to Rockledge
Equipment	Equipment procurement
Shelters	Not catering to shelters

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Specific Comments regarding positive changes.

Comment Group	Focus Group	Comments
Management	4	Mr. Bonembarger has done a lot of good things. Uniforms get us respect.
	3	Mr. Bonembarger is highly motivated. He works hard.
	4	Management in general was "chicken shit". It is 100% better now due to Mr. Bonembarger and Barbara Grapland
	5	Our director has taken us out of bondage. He listens, and empowers. We have a better ordinance under him.
	5	Door is always open to voice an opinion.
	2	Mr. Bonembarger goes to bat for us.
	4	Old supervisor is gone.
	2	New director's management style is refreshing. He is direct.
	2	New director. We did not have one for a year.
	2	Director takes the job and people seriously.
	1	Able to talk to management. More at ease.
	1	Mr. Bonembarger can be talked to. Last supervisor could not be talked to.
	2	Director follows up. Always get an answer even if it is not the one I wanted.
	2	New management helps employees get along with each other. Are handling troubled employees.
	1	More consistent direction. "Convenience memory" is gone.
	1	Management backs us up more.
	1	Not screamed at any more.
	1	More power – leeway to give answers to the public.
	5	Director part of the Chiefs Association. He can tell our story.
	5	Last year we went from 0 to 10 because of Mr. Bonembarger coming and freeing up others to make changes.
	3	People are treated a little better than the past. Not as much ridicule.
	3	Change in management for the good. Old ones were abusive.
Uniforms	3	New uniforms are nice even if they are not durable.
	5	Uniforms have helped our image
	5	Image is professional. Other departments respect us. Uniforms played a big role.
Building	1	Work environment. Pineda was bad. It was hot, cold, smelly and small.
	2	Move to Rockledge put us together with more space. We want to stay here.
Equipment	5	We can get equipment when we need it.
Shelters	4	We do not cater to the shelters as much as we used to.

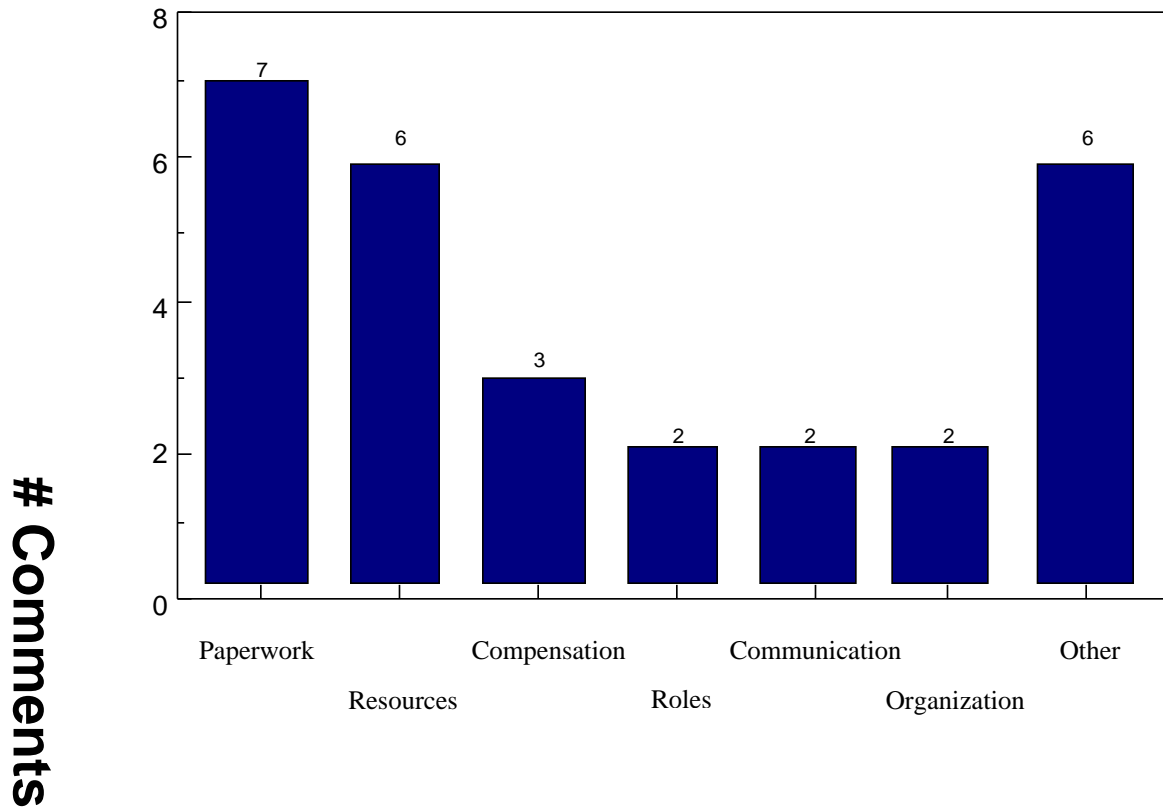
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Specific Comment Information

Below is a summary of the Comments received from the question, “If you could fix one thing, what would it be?”

One Thing to Fix



Comment Group	Explanation
Paperwork	Need to reduce paperwork
Resources	Shortage of people
Compensation	Pay and overtime issues
Roles	What the department should and should not do.
Communication	Communication among employees
Organization	Make a department
Other	Single Comments

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Specific Comments related to items to fix.

Comment Group	Focus Group	Comments
Paperwork	2	Typing would end handwriting errors and speed up the process
	2	Send electronically to each truck. They could print out orders.
	2	Too much paperwork. Case reports are handwritten. Computers are here but are collecting dust. Need our own programmer to match screens and forms.
	2	Too much paperwork from dispatch to management. Computerize dispatch like MARTA and 9-1-1.
	2	Officers don't always do their paperwork right or thoroughly. They have so much paperwork. Cut out procedures.
	2	Computerize all the tags.
	2	Less paper, more computer systems for faster access.
Resources	3	Let us work 8-5.
	3	Reduce the overtime.
	3	More employees and equipment./
	4	More officers.
	1	More people.
	4	25 officers.
Compensation	3	Make an income where I can have a decent life. More proper salary.
	4	Loss of 1 _ overtime pay when I have to take off sick.
	4	Loss of O.T. pay when have to rest in the morning after working all night.
Roles	1	Inform the public of what we do and do not do.
	1	We shouldn't do livestock and gators.
Communication	5	We as a group would forget the past and work together and grow together.
	2	Not enough Communication between officers and dispatchers. They teach us so much that helps us on the phone.
Organization	5	The department would become a true separate department.
	3	Become our own department
Other	1	Dispatchers work more as a team, ignore the little things.
	4	Lack of backbone with the Councils except for Dr. Bonembarger.
	4	Treated with more respect. A garbage man makes more and gets more respect than we do. Our job is dangerous.
	4	Water facet. I can't fill my water jug up.
	1	A telephone system to segment calls.
	1	No A/C on the weekends. It gets very hot in here.

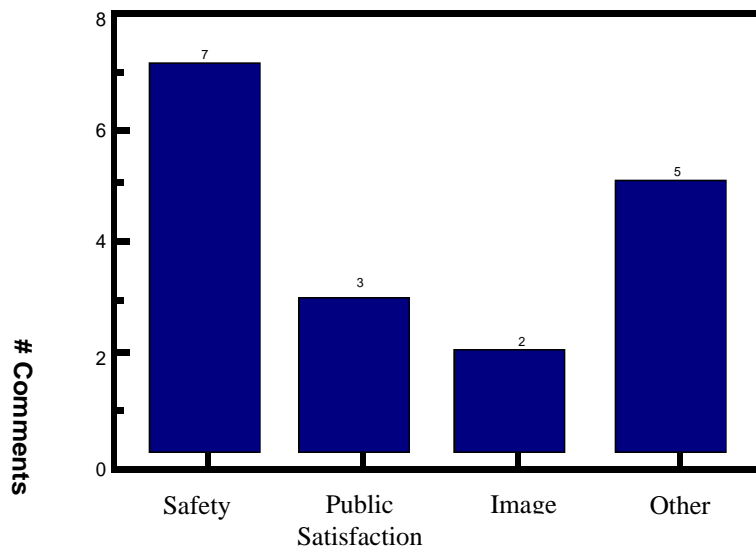
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Specific Comment Information

Below is a summary of the Comments received from the question, “What are the department’s priorities?”

Departmental Priorities



Comment Group	Explanation
Safety	Safety of the officers and public
Public Sat	Satisfaction of the needs of the public
Image	P.R. and looking good
Other	Single Comments

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Specific Comments related to items to priorities.

Comment Group	Focus Group	Comments
Safety	2	Number 1 priority is safety
	1	Safety of the officers
	1	Safety of the officers
	1	Safety of the officers
	1	Safety of the officers
	1	Safety of the officers
	3	Human and animal safety
Public Sat	2	Satisfy the public
	3	Service the public with the best service
	3	Get the work done
Image	4	P.R.
	4	Should be safety but it is to look good
Other	2	Tags
	3	Management should be to eliminate work load
	4	Whatever the Council says
	3	Training for officers
	5	Working together as a team