

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
CITY OF BALTIMORE



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

Investigative
Report Synopsis

OIG Case #25-0004-I

Issued: October 29, 2024



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
City Hall, Suite 635
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, MD 21202



October 29, 2024

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse. The following synopsis is a condensed version of the full report provided to City management officials and does not contain all investigative information.

During an ongoing investigation involving the Department of Public Works (DPW) Bureau of Solid Waste (BSW), the OIG requested records of “reported heat-related illnesses for DPW employees from January 2021 to the present”, from both DPW and Risk management. The OIG identified omissions in the documentation provided. Risk Management’s provided records showed twenty-six (26) heat-related illnesses, while DPW’s spreadsheet listed only sixteen (16) between January 2021 and July 2024.

Heat-Related Illness Requests

On July 25, 2024, the OIG requested records of reported heat-related illnesses from DPW for employees from January 2021 to the present. On the same day, the OIG also requested the same records from Risk Management.

The OIG received the records from Risk Management and DPW. Risk Management stated they would work with the City’s third-party worker’s compensation claim administrator (Worker’s Comp Administrator) for the records. DPW also said the Worker’s Comp Administrator provided the reported heat-related illness records.

Risk Management’s records contained reported illnesses up to July 25, 2024.¹ The OIG received DPW’s records on August 9, 2024. While reviewing both records, the investigation found that DPW’s spreadsheet was missing ten (10) employee-reported illnesses that were present on Risk Management’s heat-related illness spreadsheet. Moreover, the column numbers on DPW’s spreadsheet were not sequential, and some rows appeared to have been removed before being provided to the OIG.

Among the ten (10) illnesses omitted, the employees reported descriptions that included various instances of lightheadedness, dehydration, blacking out due to heat, dizziness and vomiting, heat stroke, fainting, chaffing due to excessive heat, and cramping. Six (6) of the ten (10) employee-reported illnesses that were not found on DPW’s spreadsheet occurred on days when temperatures reached 90°F or higher, with two (2) that occurred on a 103°F day.

¹ Three (3) employee illnesses reported on the DPW spreadsheet were not present in the Risk Management records. However, these claims were opened during August 2024.

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE

HOTLINE: 443-984-3476/800-417-0430 EMAIL: OIG@BALTIMORECITY.GOV WEBSITE: OIG.BALTIMORECITY.GOV

This public synopsis is only a summary of a more comprehensive report of investigation submitted to the appropriate City management official

The nature and result of six (6) illnesses that were missing from DPW's spreadsheet were listed as "syncope."² According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, syncope is another word for fainting or passing out.³ There are several types of syncope, including heat.⁴ Syncope can be triggered by dehydration and upright posture.

OIG FINDINGS

The investigation revealed omissions between the number of DPW heat illnesses reported by DPW and Risk Management. The OIG requested all reported heat-related illnesses for DPW employees. Ten (10) illnesses were not provided on DPW's spreadsheet. The absence of information in response to the OIG's document request is concerning, especially if the same incomplete information was provided to the Maryland Occupational Safety and Health and the law firm reviewing DPW's heat standards. Removing information could obstruct multiple investigations. The matter has been turned over to law enforcement for further review.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Nick Mosby, Baltimore City Council President
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Baltimore City Solicitor

² The "nature and result description" is column L on the excerpt of DPW's spreadsheet used in the full OIG report and is referenced in DPW's response letter. Column K on the spreadsheet excerpt is cause description.

³ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/syncope-fainting>

⁴ <https://koreystringer.institute.uconn.edu/heat-syncope>

Department of Public Works

Response

Case # 25-0004-I

CITY OF BALTIMORE

BRANDON M. SCOTT, Mayor



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Khalil Zaied, Director
Abel Wolman Municipal Building, 6th Floor
200 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

October 23, 2024

Ms. Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General
100 N. Holliday Street, Suite 635
Baltimore, MD 21202

RE: DPW Response to OIG Case # 25-0004-I, dated 10/15/2024

Inspector General Cumming:

This correspondence will serve as the Department of Public Work's official management response to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) 5Report 25-0004-I, dated October 15, 2024 (the "Referral"). The Referral references discrepancies in the information provided by the Department of Public Works (DPW) for heat-related illnesses. Specifically, the report notes that ten (10) employees who had reported suffering from a heat-related illness were not included on a report from DPW. I have researched the issues described and am happy to respond to the report's findings.

Evidently, when DPW staff obtained the heat-related illness report from Sedgwick, they noted and omitted instances they believed were first described as heat-related but, upon evaluation, were not. Specifically, they used the classification in columns K and L in the report to determine whether an illness was heat-related. If that was not explicitly stated on the report, it was omitted as staff believed that was the official determination by Mercy Hospital as to the cause of the illness.

I want to be clear that this should not have occurred. We should have provided the information as received from Sedgwick without omission. If there were any questions as to whether something should or should not have been included, we should have reached out to you and your team proactively for clarification.

I have discussed this matter with all involved and do not believe there was an attempt to obstruct or obfuscate. I believe the staff wanted to provide the most accurate information and thought the information from Sedgwick was inaccurate. All involved have been instructed that the report should have been submitted without omission and that, in the future, extra care should be taken to ensure we are fully responsive to requests for information.

Further, noting your concerns about inaccurate information being provided to MOSH, I have asked for all information that was sent. At this point, MOSH did not ask DPW for this type of report or information. Instead, they requested copies of OSHA 300 forms, which have been provided.

I want to thank you and your staff for your diligence on these issues as we work to strengthen accountability, transparency, and standard operating procedures.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further concerns or require additional information.

Best Regards,

Khalil Zaied

Khalil Zaied
Director