

7.07 Progressive Discipline

The County in general subscribes to a policy of progressive discipline. Progressive discipline is not intended to be punitive. The goal of progressive discipline is to help the employee recognize and correct unacceptable behavior before it becomes serious enough, or frequent enough, to warrant termination of employment. **Certain offenses and misconduct may be severe enough to require immediate removal from employment without applying progressive discipline. Unclassified employees serve at the pleasure of the Appointing Authority and can be removed from their position at any time, without application of progressive discipline.**

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Application

When progressive discipline is applied, the County shall examine the totality of the employee's current disciplinary record, including, but not limited to, attendance and tardiness discipline that remains active.

Procedure

Supervisors and managers are responsible for exercising independent judgement to identify and recommend the need for discipline.

When a management representative recommends discipline, they shall consult with Human Resources for guidance and to ensure consistency across the organization. Prior to recommending discipline, supervisors must have investigated and obtained documentation of the alleged conduct.

After a supervisor has recommended discipline, the role of Human Resources is to provide guidance on the level of discipline to be imposed. If the facts of the case may justify a suspension, demotion, or removal, the management representative will complete a request for Pre-Disciplinary Conference (PDC).

The purpose of the PDC is to provide the employee with a final opportunity to present their side of the case and to provide any additional information or documentation that the employee desires to be considered. Human Resources will coordinate the PDC and will provide written notice to the employee and supervisor regarding the date, time, and location of the PDC. Employees shall be provided with the option of waiving the PDC. Employees shall have the right to take an audio or video recording of their PDC.

Depending on the nature of the discipline that is ultimately issued, employees will be notified of discipline by their supervisor or Human Resources.

All disciplinary actions that are imposed shall be filed with Human Resources. Disciplinary actions will remain active for two (2) years for purposes of progressive discipline. The two (2) year period shall be measured backward from the date of the subsequent offense to the date the prior discipline was imposed.

- **Verbal Reprimand:** A verbal reprimand is an articulation of the problem by the supervisor to the employee. A verbal reprimand shall note the date and nature of the problem, as well as specifically state the employee is receiving a verbal reprimand.

- **Written Reprimand:** A written reprimand is formal, written notice by the supervisor to the employee that their conduct is inappropriate, what actions are necessary to correct the misconduct, and the consequences of continued misconduct.

- **Working Suspension:** A working suspension results when an employee is required to report to work to serve a suspension. An employee serving a working suspension shall be compensated at their regular rate of pay for hours worked. The working suspension shall be recorded in the employee's personnel file and has the same effect as a suspension for the purposes of progressive discipline.

- **Suspension:** A suspension is a forced, unpaid leave of absence from employment for one (1) or more days.

- **Demotion:** A demotion is a forced transfer of the employee from one classification or job to another classification or job in a lower pay grade.

- **Removal:** A removal is a forced separation of employment.

A record of any disciplinary action must be made using a form prescribed by Human Resources and will be placed in the employee's personnel file.

At the sole discretion of the Director of Human Resources or designee, an employee may be temporarily placed on paid administrative leave. This may be necessary because the employee's actions indicate that remaining on the job or returning to the job may be detrimental to the employee, co-workers, customers or the County. Employees who are placed on paid administrative leave shall be prepared to return to work each day and may be subject to other requirements determined by Human Resources.

Prohibited Conduct

The County considers the following to be a non-exhaustive list of unsatisfactory conduct that may be considered grounds for progressive disciplinary action:

- Absence from duty without reasonable cause
- Absence without leave
- Being away from assigned work area without permission of supervisor
- Conduct that might endanger the safety of others
- Conduct unbecoming an employee of the County

• Creating a hostile, intimidating or offensive work environment based upon a protected characteristic

- Excessive absenteeism
- Excessive tardiness
- Failure to comply with safety regulations, procedures and/or guidelines
- Failure to cooperate in a workplace investigation
- Failure to follow call in procedures
- Failure to follow the orders of a supervisor
- Failure to properly report work status
- Failure to report known safety hazards
- Failure to wear required safety equipment
- Falsification
- Fighting
- Harassment, discrimination or retaliation against another
- Insubordination
- Intimidation or threats Cuyahoga County Employee Handbook 41
- Misfeasance, malfeasance or nonfeasance
- Neglect of duty
- Offensive language or conduct toward another
- Poor job performance
- Possession of weapons on County premises without authorization
- Reckless operation and/or misuse of County vehicles and equipment
- Reporting for or being on duty in an unfit condition to work
- Reporting to work under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs
- Sleeping while on duty
- Theft
- Use of or possession of alcohol and/or drugs on County property

- Destruction of County property
- Violation of policies, procedures, rules, regulations, or guidelines

Evaluation of Inappropriate Conduct

All inappropriate conduct shall be evaluated on a case by case basis, considering the following factors:

- Level of disruption to County business.
- Level of harm to the County's interests.
- Level of damage to the public's trust and confidence in Cuyahoga County government.
- The employee's position and the degree of responsibility inherent in that position (i.e., supervisory vs. non-supervisory positions). Employees who occupy a supervisory or management position are held to a higher standard of conduct commensurate with the level of leadership required of them.
- Whether the employee's conduct is part of a continuing problem.
- Whether the employee's conduct put a co-worker, vendor or customer's safety and/or security at risk.
- Whether the employee's truthfulness brought into question because of his or her conduct.
- Whether there are extenuating or mitigating circumstances.

Appeals

The Cuyahoga County Charter provides classified non-bargaining employees an appeals process for certain disciplinary action through the Personnel Review Commission (PRC). Details are available on the website of the PRC. Bargaining employees should review their CBA regarding appeals.