

CITY OF MIAMI BEACH  
Office of the City Manager  
Letter to Commission No. 128-2004



To: Mayor David Dermer and  
Members of the City Commission

Date: May 25, 2004

From: Jorge M. Gonzalez  
City Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jorge", written over the printed name of the City Manager.

Subject: **SWIM ASSESSMENTS FOR CITY OF MIAMI BEACH FIREFIGHTERS**

The purpose of this LTC is to inform you of a recent item that appeared in a WSVN Channel 7 News report on May 13, 2004. An LTC advising you of this report was sent on May 11, 2004. The report on the swimming abilities of the City of Miami Beach Firefighters was initiated by complaints from an unknown City of Miami Beach Firefighter. The complaints were presented to the Fire Chief during an interview requested to discuss the Fire Department's swim assessment program. Without any knowledge of the complaints, the Fire Chief continued the interview. The complaints presented to the Fire Chief were the following:

1. The City of Miami Beach does not have a swimming requirement for firefighters;
2. The Fire Department does not conduct swim training;
3. None of the firefighters hired since the City eliminated the swim requirement can swim.

Of the three complaints presented only the first one is correct. The City of Miami Beach does not have a swim requirement and has not had one since 1993. The other two complaints are incorrect and information was subsequently provided by the Fire Chief supporting the fact that the Fire Department conducts swim training, and the majority of firefighters hired since 1993 can indeed swim.

The Fire Department is currently conducting mandatory swim assessments for all firefighters assigned to Fire Operations. The decision to make the assessments mandatory was made in 2003. The purpose of the swim assessments is to determine the swimming skill levels of all Miami Beach Firefighters and provide appropriate swim training for any firefighter who needs additional remediation. Since March of 2003, the Fire Department analyzed their swim requirements, and after the swim assessments in May 2003, they began to develop swim standards for their personnel. The Fire Department developed three standards: a minimum standard for all personnel, a rescue swim standard, and a second choice rescue swim standard (see attached memo). It is important to note that the minimum swim standard used by the Channel Seven news story does not demonstrate the ability to be a rescue swimmer. The minimum standard is a self-save standard that only requires completing three laps in a swimming pool. A rescue swimmer must complete sixteen laps. Currently, The Fire Department's internal swim training courses include Dive, Remediation, and Surf Rescue Training.

The Fire Chief is confident the results of the swim assessments will demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of the Miami Beach Firefighters have swim abilities far in excess of the minimum swim requirements used in the Channel Seven news report. Since 1999, all new firefighters complete a swim assessment during their probationary training. Of the fifty-one (51) firefighters hired and retained since 1999, forty-nine (49) have demonstrated swimming abilities far in excess of the minimum standard. Two are non-swimmers and will be trained to minimum requirements in a mandatory remediation program. A report of the swim assessments will be provided when completed.

It is important to recognize that the Fire Department has responded to every water emergency and handled each emergency successfully. There has not been a single water emergency where a citizen, patient or firefighter expired or received any injuries as result of a lack of swimming skills. Last year, the Fire Department responded to 17,683 emergencies, 17 of which were water incidents. Annually, the City recognizes Miami Beach Firefighters for their courage and outstanding performances at the scene of water emergencies. Many of those who are recognized are firefighters hired since the City of Miami Beach eliminated the swim requirement.

If you need any additional information, or have any questions regarding this information, please feel free to contact me.

JMG/FJ/dd

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CITY CLERK'S OFFICE

# **MIAMI BEACH FIRE DEPARTMENT**

## **SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION**

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**TO:** Chief F. Jordan

**DATE:** 3-17-04

**FROM:** Capt. W. Howard

**SUBJECT:** Swim Requirements for personnel

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As per our last meeting Lt. Cook, Lt. Morris and I discussed parameters to be used in determining first and second choices for rescue swimmers. Here are the recommendations we propose:

**Swim Minimum Standards for all personnel:**

75 yard pool swim, non stop

30 second breath hold

8-10 feet dive to retrieve a 10 pound weight

**Rescue Swimmer Standards:**

400 yard pool swim in 10 minutes or less

25 yard underwater swim while holding breath

5 minute tread water, the first minute legs only

**Second Choice Rescue Swimmer:**

The swimmer completed all the requirements of a Rescue Swimmer with the exception of swimming the 400 yards in 10 minutes. The swimmer must have completed at least 300 yards in the 10 minutes.

Personnel not completing a minimum of 300 yards should be utilized on shore. These personnel will not be able to affect a water rescue in a timely manner.

We are available to discuss these proposals at your convenience.