
Biola Community Services District

POLICY HANDBOOK

POLICY TITLE: Claims Against the District

POLICY NUMBER: 1040

The purpose of this policy is to provide direction to District staff for processing and resolving (if possible) account adjustment requests and property damage claims against the District. Inherent in this policy is the recognition that every adjustment request or claim will be unique, and that guidelines cannot be written to accommodate every case. Therefore, staff must use discretion and good sense in handling each claim.

1040.1 Property (Land and Improvements) Damage Claims

In the course of the District's operations – water and waste water systems maintenance – damage to land and improvements thereon occasionally occurs due to the proximity of the District's facilities to the private property. When District employees are aware that property has been damaged in the course of their work, restorative measures are to be taken to return the property as close to its original condition as possible.

When a property owner informs a District employee of damage to their property (by telephone or in person), the employee receiving the claim will document in writing the time and date, and a description of the stated circumstances and allegations. Employees should respond to questions, be cordial and respectful, but refrain from commenting on liability questions.

As soon as possible after information about the damage has been received, it shall be given to the General Manager. The General Manager, or his/her designee, shall investigate the property owner's allegations

If the owner of damaged property informs a member of the Board of Directors, the information will be given to the General Manager. Directors should not independently investigate claims, but may go with staff to observe.

Investigations shall be done in a timely fashion and documented with a written report, including photographs and/or interviews, when appropriate. A copy of the report shall be submitted to the General Manager.

If the investigating staff person is convinced that the damage was caused by District personnel, equipment, or infrastructure, he/she shall prepare a work order to have the damage repaired, subject to the following conditions:

- (a) Property owner agrees that the proposed repairs are appropriate and adequate;

- (b) Property owner agrees to allow District personnel access to their property to perform the repair work;
- (c) District personnel have the necessary tools, equipment, and expertise to perform the necessary work;
- (d) Repair work can be accomplished within a reasonable amount of time; and,
- (e) Cost of material for the repairs will not exceed \$500.

If the cost of material for repairs is stated by claimant or estimated by staff to exceed \$500, the owner will be asked to submit their claim in writing on a District claim form [*attached hereto as Appendix A*].

The General Manager shall review the damage claim and the proposed repair work. If he/she determines that the damage is the District's responsibility and that the proposed repair work is appropriate, he/she may authorize the work if the cost of material for the repairs will not exceed \$1,500. A report shall be submitted to the Claims Committee [*standing board committee assigned to review claims of this nature*] describing the damage claim, including a description of the manner in which it was resolved.

If the cost of material for repairs is stated by claimant or estimated to exceed \$1,500, the claim will be submitted to the Claims Committee. The Claims Committee shall review the claim and receive input from staff in closed session [*qualifies as "anticipated litigation" under the Brown Act*]. After reviewing the damage claim, the Committee may authorize the work if the cost of material for the repairs will not exceed \$3,000, or may make a recommendation to the Board of Directors. A report shall be submitted to the Board describing the damage claim, including a description of the manner in which it was resolved, or a recommendation for Board action. The claimant shall be notified of any action by the Committee regarding their claim.

If the cost of material for repairs is stated by claimant or estimated to exceed \$3,000, the claim will be submitted to the Board of Directors for its consideration. The Board will consider the claim during a closed session [*"anticipated litigation"*] of a regular or special meeting. Action to accept or reject the claim may be taken in open or closed session. The claimant shall be notified of the Board's action regarding their claim. Notification that a claim has been rejected shall be accompanied by proof of service.

The Board will not consider a claim of an amount in excess of the insurance deductible (currently \$10,000), including the cost of investigation, without prior written approval of the District's insurance company.

Claims in excess of the District's insurance deductible shall be forwarded to the insurance company, and the claimant shall be advised of this action.

Claims for personal injury/wrongful death shall not be investigated by District staff or directors but shall be immediately forwarded to the District's insurance company.

1040.2 Property (Vehicles and Unsecured Property) Damage Claims

All claims of damage to vehicles or other unsecured property shall be submitted to the General Manager. He/she shall review the damage claim and the requested restitution. If he/she determines that the damage is the District's responsibility, he/she may authorize repairs or reimbursement of expenses to an amount not to exceed \$1,500. A report shall be submitted to the Claims Committee describing the damage claim, including a description of the manner in which it was resolved.

The claim will be processed as described above if the cost of material for repairs is estimated to exceed \$1,500.

1040.3 Property Damage Claims On District Form

Except for damage to land and improvements estimated to cost less than \$500, all damage claims must be submitted in writing on a District claim form. This will ensure that a claim is valid and protect important rights of the District.

If an individual does not wish to file a claim on the District form, he/she may present the claim by letter if it conforms to Section 910 and Section 910.2, California Government Code. Section 910 specifies that a claim needs to show all of the following:

- (a) The name and post office address of the claimant.
- (b) The post office address to which the person presenting the claim desires notices to be sent.
- (c) The date, place, and other circumstances of the occurrence or transaction which gave rise to the claim asserted.
- (d) A general description of the indebtedness, obligation, injury, damage or loss incurred so far as it may be known as the time of presentation of the claim.
- (e) The name or names of the public employee or employees causing the injury, damage, or loss, if known.
- (f) The amount claimed if it totals less than ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) as of the date of presentation of the claim, including the estimated amount of any prospective injury, damage, or loss, insofar as it may be known at the time of the presentation of the claim, together with the basis of computation of the amount claimed. If the amount claimed exceeds ten thousand dollars (\$10,000), no dollar amount shall be included in the claim. However, it shall indicate whether the claim would be a limited civil case.

Section 910.2 of the California Government Code specifies the following:

The claim shall be signed by the claimant or by some person on his behalf. Claims against local public entities for supplies, materials, equipment or services need not be signed by the claimant or on his behalf if presented on a billhead or invoice regularly used in the conduct of the business of the claimant.

If the filed letter/claim does not meet the requirements of the California Government Code §910 and §910.2, then a letter shall be sent to the claimant informing them of this fact.

District staff shall provide no assistance to the claimant in filling out the claim form. Claimant must fill out the claim form in its entirety and submit it via mail, FAX, or personal delivery to the District office. Upon receipt, office staff shall date-stamp the document.

1040.4 Account Adjustment Requests

The General Manager is authorized to adjust a customer's water service account when their bill reflects usage that is significantly greater than normal, due to accidental loss of water through broken pipes or when faucets are turned on in the owner's absence, etc., subject to the following conditions:

- (a) the customer requests the account adjustment in writing;
- (b) a similar request has not been made within the past 12 months; and,
- (c) the account shows no record of being delinquent for more than 60 days during the past 24 months.