

2001-2002 GRAND JURY REPORT

Riverside County

Department of Mental Health

Background

Riverside County Department of Mental Health (RCHMH) leased and occupied the facilities at 1695 Spruce Street, in Riverside, California on December 27, 1996, prior to receiving their certificate of occupancy, issued by the City of Riverside, on January 23, 1997. The certificate certified that the building described had been inspected and met code requirements. The 19,872 square foot facility provides office space for Crisis Outpatient Services, Older Adult Services, and Community Care Central. The facility, including 112 parking spaces was leased for a term of 84 months – with an option to extend. The county approved payment of \$17,884.80 per month with a provision to adjust the monthly rental on each anniversary date. The current monthly rate is \$20,833.32. The lease stipulates that the lessor will make improvements in compliance with all federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, rules, codes and regulations, including fire, health, and safety prior to occupancy.

The Riverside County Safety Manual states, "Every county facility owned, leased, operated, or occupied by the county, must at minimum, be formally inspected on an annual basis by supervisory personnel who play a major role in conducting safety inspections." (Ref: paragraph IVA, and paragraph II "who inspects," page 402-2, County of Riverside Standard Safety Operations Manual last revised 3/1/97)

Findings

1. A pre-occupancy inspection of the mental health building was not conducted by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, County Safety Department, Facilities Management, or the City of Riverside Building and Safety Division, to insure the building met current safety regulations and lease agreement requirements.

2. A Grand Jury field inspection conducted on November 27, 2001, revealed the handicapped parking area, located at the east end of the building, was placed on a dangerously steep slope. This made moving on the surface difficult for handicapped persons in wheelchairs and walkers to navigate their way up or down the parking ramp. ADA regulations require a gradient of not more than 2 percent in any direction. (Ref: paragraph 4D, Surface Parking Space Design, page 154, dated c2000PCC) The grade at that time revealed a steep slope that was in excess of 20 percent. (Figure 1 and 2)
3. A 36-inch walkway between the front of parked vehicles and an adjacent building's walls was not available at the Mental Health Facility. (Figure 3 and 4) This violation forced patrons to walk behind several parked vehicles in order to gain access to the building. (Ref: paragraph 3, page 154, Code 1129B.4.3, Arrangement of Parking Spaces of The California Disabled Accessibility Guidebook states, "Accessible parking spaces are located such that they do not compel users to travel behind parked cars other than their own.")
4. The asphalt surface of the parking area was irregular with deep grooves created by vehicles scraping the asphalt when parking on the steep incline. (Figure 1) These grooves were a hazard, especially, for handicapped people using walkers or wheelchairs.
5. Numerous internal memos since April 1997, concerning these same safety issues were sent to managers and supervisors. Correspondence from the County Safety Office was sent to the Department of Mental Health on June 28, 1999 concerning these same issues.
6. Safety records reveal that annual building inspections are not being performed as required by Riverside County Standard Safety Operations Manual.
7. The parking lot has been reconfigured to correct known violations.

Recommendations

**County Board of Supervisors
Director, Department of Mental Health
Director, Facilities Management
Director, County Safety Office
County ADA Coordinator
City of Riverside Building and Safety Division**

1. Board of Supervisors direct all department heads to adhere to and enforce annual inspection schedules on all owned or leased properties, as required by paragraph IV-A, County of Riverside Standard Safety Operations Manual, revised 3/1/97.
2. County Safety Department, ADA Coordinator, Facilities Management, and all appropriate city and county agencies inspect all county owned and leased buildings and grounds to insure they meet current ADA, fire, health and safety regulations before a certificate of occupancy is issued and the facility is occupied.
3. Continue to make appropriate repairs to all facilities bringing them up to current codes and safety regulations.



Figure 1 - View of Mental Health parking lot showing slope and grooves in the pavement (11/27/01)



Figure 2 - Difficulty in using a walker or a wheelchair on steep slope (11/27/01)



Figure 3 - Narrow space between vehicle and wall. ADA rules require three feet (11/27/01).



Figure 4 - Impossibility of using a walker or wheelchair between vehicle and wall (11/27/01)