

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Santa Barbara County Whistleblower Hotline?

The Whistleblower Hotline is a 24-hour online and telephonic mechanism for reporting suspected fraud, waste, abuse, or other misconduct by County employees, contractors and vendors. The online feature of the Hotline can also be used to get the status of previously filed complaints.

You may make a report 24 hours a day, seven days a week by telephone, or using the online form through this website. The County has contracted with Navex Global, to provide the independent, secure EthicsPoint portal.

2. Why do we have a system like EthicsPoint?

- We believe that our employees are our most important asset. By creating open channels of communication, we can promote a positive work environment and maximize productivity.
- It is good practice for governments to have an anonymous reporting vehicle to address accounting and auditing fraud.
- An effective reporting system will augment our other efforts to foster a culture of integrity and ethical decision-making.

3. Who can file a report?

Anyone who has evidence, related to Santa Barbara County, that fraud, waste, abuse, or corruption, may have occurred, or is occurring, should file a report.

4. What can be considered fraud, waste or abuse for reporting?

Term	Definition	Examples
Fraud	Any intentional act or omissions designed to deceive others that results in the County suffering a loss of money, property, or other disadvantage to which the employee would not be entitled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theft or misuse of County money, equipment, supplies, or other materials • Intentionally misrepresenting the costs of goods and services provided • Soliciting or accepting a bribe or kickback • Falsifying payroll information
Waste	The intentional or unintentional thoughtless, reckless, or careless expenditure, consumption, mismanagement, use or squandering of County resources. Waste also includes incurring unnecessary costs because of negligently efficient or ineffective practices, systems, or controls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unnecessary spending of County funds to purchase supplies or equipment • Failure to reuse or recycle major resources or reduce waste generation
Abuse	Intentional destruction, diversion, manipulation, misapplication, maltreatment, or misuse of County resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating unneeded overtime • Using one's position to gain financial advantage that is not available to others • Receiving favors for awarding contracts to certain vendors • Travel choices that are contrary to existing travel policies or are extravagant or expensive. • Failure to report damage to County equipment or property • Misusing the official's position for personal gain.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making procurement or vendor selections that are contrary to existing policies or are extravagant or expensive.
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5. What information should I provide when filing a report?

In order to process a complaint, the following information should be provided, to the best of your ability. **If you do not provide adequate information, we will not be able to complete an investigation.**

Specific information and facts regarding the alleged misconduct incident should include:

- Name/names of individual(s) that clearly identifies the person you are alleging has acted improperly and, if possible, the department where that person works.
- A description of the fraud, waste, and/or abuse.
- When and where did the incident occur?
- How did the alleged misconduct occur?
- How was the incident brought to your attention?
- If there are witnesses who can confirm the validity of your statements, please provide names and contact information.
- How long have the conditions been occurring?
- Does any evidence exist? Do you have documents/photos/video to support what you are alleging?
- Who supervises the individual(s) involved in the alleged misconduct?
- If the individuals involved in the alleged misconduct are not employees of the County, are they a contractor/vendor doing business with the County?

6. Why should I report fraud?

When fraud is allowed to continue, it jeopardizes the level of service government can provide its residents and can ultimately result in higher taxes/and or decreasing levels of service to constituents. Our County chooses to promote ethical behavior. All unethical conduct, at any level, ultimately hurts the County and all employees, including you. We all have the right to work in a positive environment and with that right comes the responsibility of acting in an ethical manner and letting the appropriate people know if someone is not acting appropriately. By working together, we can maintain a healthy and productive environment.

7. May I remain anonymous? How confidential is the Whistleblower Hotline?

Yes, you may remain anonymous. This applies to both the internet portal and the toll-free telephone hotline. Both use the EthicsPoint platform, and have the same security and confidentiality measures applied to them during delivery. No matter where you initiate a report, the EthicsPoint system strips away Internet addresses so that anonymity is totally maintained. Plus, EthicsPoint is contractually committed not to pursue a reporter's identity. It does not generate or maintain any internal connection logs with IP addresses, so no information linking your PC to EthicsPoint is available.

8. What if I want to be identified with my report?

There is a section in the report for identifying yourself, if you wish.

9. I am concerned that the information I provide EthicsPoint will ultimately reveal my identity. How can you assure me that will not happen?

The EthicsPoint system is designed to protect your anonymity. However, if you wish to remain anonymous, you, as a reporting party, need to ensure that the body of the report does not reveal your identity by accident. For example, "from my cube next to Jan Smith..." or "in my 33 years...".

10. If I give my name when reporting, am I protected from retaliation?

Yes. Santa Barbara County employees are protected under CA Government Code section 53087.6 2b,c,e 'Whistleblower' protection. If you feel you have been retaliated against for reporting a fraud, you may file a formal complaint with the Santa Barbara County Equal Employment Opportunity Division at 805.568.2807, or email at EEO-Mgr@co.santa-barbara.ca.us.

11. Isn't this system just an example of someone watching over me?

The EthicsPoint system concentrates on being a positive aspect of our overall philosophy, and allows us to assure a safe, secure, and ethical workplace. You are encouraged to seek guidance on ethical dilemmas, provide positive suggestions, or communicate a concern. Effective communication is critical in today's workplace and this is a great tool to enhance that communication.

12. What happens after filing a report?

Reports are entered directly on the EthicsPoint secure server to prevent any possible breach in security. These reports are only made available to the Internal Audit Division ("IA") of the Auditor-Controller's Office. This independent division has been charged with evaluating the report, based on the type of violation and location of the incident. Each of these report recipients has had training in keeping these reports in the utmost confidence. All complaints will be reviewed, and if appropriate, IA will investigate whether fraud, waste or abuse has occurred. In certain circumstances, IA will refer an investigation to another law enforcement agency or County department and follow up on the outcome.

Generally, a confidential report of the findings is issued to the appropriate department/agency including the District Attorney for possible criminal prosecution at the end of an investigation. Substantiated cases may result in some level of administrative action and/or criminal prosecution.

13. Can I check on the status of the investigation?

Yes, you may check the status of your case, either by phone or online, where you originally reported the incident. You will then need to enter your assigned key (provided when you initially filed a report) and self-generated password. This will enable you to see if the case has been closed, or is still being investigated. Please note, no specific details of any on-going investigation will be provided.

14. What if I remember something important about the incident after I file the report? What if the County has further questions for me concerning my report?

When you file a report at the EthicsPoint web site or through the call center, you will receive a unique user name and are asked to develop a password. You can return to the EthicsPoint system again either by Internet or telephone and access the original report to add more detail or answer questions posed by a County representative and add further information that will help resolve open issues. We strongly suggest that you return to the site in the time specified to respond to any additional questions. You and the County have now entered into an "anonymous dialogue," where situations are not only identified, but can also be resolved, no matter how complex.

15. How long does it take for a case to be investigated?

Investigations will vary in length of time, depending on the complexity of the case and how much detail is submitted with the initial case.

16. May I obtain a copy of the investigative report?

No. Reports are confidential.