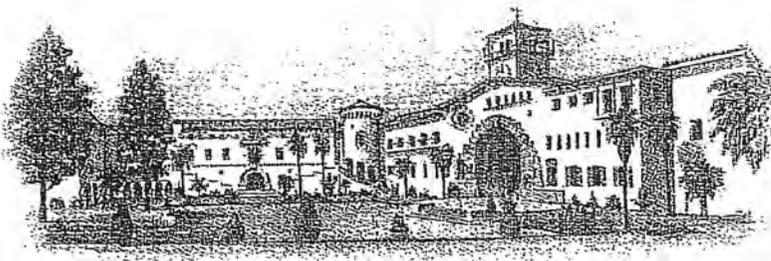


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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

RECEIVED

June 7, 2011

AUG 4 2011

Honorable Arthur A. Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
312 East Cook Street
Post Office Box 5369
Santa Maria, California 93456-5369

BY: _____

Reference: Response to Santa Barbara Civil Grand Jury Titled, *“Improving Our Emergency Alert System in the 21st Century”* (Published March 15, 2010 on Jury Web Site)

Judge Garcia:

The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors (Board) is providing its response to the above-referenced Civil Grand Jury Report. Like the Civil Grand Jury, the Board places a high priority on the emergency management responsibilities of the County. The reorganization of the Office of Emergency Services (OES) into the Executive Office, the hiring of an executive leader for OES and the construction of a new emergency operations center (EOC) all represent the Board’s commitment to this vital service.

Providing critical incident information to the public during an emergency has been a principal function of the EOC when it is activated due to a major or multi-jurisdictional emergency. In recognition of this, OES developed a Public Information/Joint Information Center Annex to the Emergency Management Plan (also referred to as the “Emergency Operations Plan”) by working with jurisdictions and agencies. This guiding document, which the Grand Jury described as a, “... county-wide comprehensive plan for conveying information to the public...” has been used in training and is under continual refinement.

In accordance with the Grand Jury’s direction, responses are provided in accordance with Section 933.05 of the California Penal Code.

Finding 1

“The present Reverse 911® emergency alert system has shortfalls in its ability to alert/inform affected residents and media under certain emergency conditions and during certain times.”

The Board agrees with the finding.

The Board understands from staff that no system is perfect. The Reverse 911® system, like other tools, has limitations. Telephones and cell phones must be in working order for Reverse 911® to be effective. During power outages, cordless landline phones with a base station are not functional. To establish a Reverse 911® call-out secession requires several steps such as message development and geographic plotting. Although the Board is proud of the Sherriff’s Office in its use of 911®, the Board realizes that this is not an instantaneous process. As staff has previously written the Grand Jury, Reverse 911® is only one aspect of communicating with the impacted public during an emergency that requires mass notification.

Recommendation 1b

“The Board of Supervisors directs the Office of Emergency Services to designate emergency radio/television stations to begin operation at any time the Reverse 911® is activated and reach affected residents.”

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

While OES and the Sheriff’s Office (the County’s program administrator for Reverse 911®) interact regularly with the local media during emergencies, it is an overly broad direction to contact the media, “...any time the Reverse 911® is activated...” During a major emergency where there is broad threat to the public and OES and the EOC have been activated, (e.g., large fires, major hazardous materials spill, etc.) it would be OES’ intent to notify the public through parallel systems, such as the media, web sites and other emergency messaging systems, while Reverse 911® is being prepared for execution. Prior to OES or EOC activation, the on-scene Incident Commander, working with the incident PIO, would work directly with the media and field staff to notify endangered residents.

Activating the local media for instances in which Reverse 911® is being used to alert a neighborhood for a lost or missing person at, for example 3AM, does little to enhance response to our knowledge of the situation. The Sheriff’s Office has repeatedly demonstrated their partnership with the local media in situations such as the latter.

The Sheriff’s Office uses Reverse 911® in partnership with OES during activations of the emergency management system. However, the Sheriff’s Office has also used Reverse 911® without OES’ involvement, (e.g., lost elderly residents). While the relationship between the two agencies in regard to Reverse 911® during major emergencies is appropriate, it would be inappropriate to dictate to OES when it would use the resources beyond its authority or when the scope of the incident dictates.

Recommendation 1c

“The Board of Supervisors directs the Office of Emergency Services immediately to find and implement, subject to the approval of the Board of Supervisors, additional and more effective systems to alert and communicate with residents in a timely manner during any type of emergency.”

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

Over the progression of recent disasters and emergencies, the Board has found that OES’ use of radio, television, internet-based providers, OES’ text/email system (Nixle.com), OES’ social media site (Facebook, Twitter and Flickr), and Reverse 911[®] are appropriate. The Board expects OES to continually find and improve systems for providing the public emergency information. In identifying those potential improvements, it is incumbent on OES’ leadership to propagate those systems locally, and develop comprehensive approaches to emergency public information throughout the county (also referred to as the “Operational Area”).

While not optimal, each individual jurisdiction also has the authority to develop and manage their own emergency communication platforms; cities are responsible for the health, welfare and safety of their respective citizens. OES has encouraged the use of similar systems throughout the county. However, OES cannot force a particular jurisdiction to use an “OES approved system”. For example, the cities of Goleta and Santa Maria have decided to use their own emergency telephone notification system (CONNECT CTY) rather than the Sheriff’s Office’s Reverse 911[®] system. If jurisdictions use their own system, OES’ goal is that jurisdictions coordinate their own use. OES cannot, however, direct or mandate a city to implement a particular notification system.

Recommendation 1d

“The Board of Supervisors directs the Office of Emergency Services to fund, subject to the approval of the Board of Supervisors, efforts by local jurisdictions to incorporate more effective alert/inform systems to communicate with residents in a timely manner during any type of emergency.”

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

As discussed in Recommendation 1c, OES continues to encourage cities, agencies and jurisdictions to utilize similar systems and protocols. An example of the cooperative approach to emergency public information is the development and training towards OES’ “Public Information Annex”. Training includes representatives from throughout the county. This includes first responders, city PIOs and emergency managers. Again however, while OES encourages the development of similar systems, OES cannot require an independent jurisdiction to use a system directed by OES.

Finding 2

“During past crises, emergency agencies have not always communicated with each other which may have slowed information being passed to affected residents.”

The Board partially disagrees with this finding, because the finding does not note the communications improvements that have been made over the past several years.

During past incidents – over a several year period – the flow of information from the incident into the EOC has not always been optimal. Unclear channels of communication between the field and the EOC, respective role definition and a lack of a pre-established plans inhibited rapid incident information coordination. The Board disagrees that improvements have not been made over that same period.

As incident information flows into the EOC, the Board agrees with both OES and the Sheriff's Department in their respective Grand Jury responses, that persons found to be in immediate danger should receive timely and effective information from incident commanders in order to take necessary life-saving actions. This swift action by field personnel was evident during the Jesusita Fire in which field staff demonstrated leadership by initiating evacuations of the public when the fire spread unpredictably to the west.

OES has worked with local agencies and jurisdictions to improve emergency information flow in conducting plan development, trainings and plan updates. The Board has previously been provided copies of the PIO/Joint Information Center Annex as a result of its concern for the emergency public information processes. The Board recognizes that OES and the first response agencies must ensure that published information be validated by dependable sources. However, as a result of the Board's interest and the desire of OES and the first response agencies to improve the flow of information, improvements have been made. These positive changes were evidenced by the timely flow of communication during the March 20, 2011 flooding emergency. In this incident, field staff rapidly provided high-quality information to an activated EOC that was staffed with management representatives from fire, law enforcement, flood control officials, emergency management staff and via telephone conferences and electronic mail, federal officials with the Bureau of Reclamation.

OES has been, and is directed by the Board to continue, working with its emergency and jurisdictional partners to continue development and refinement of plans that integrate EOC & incident command communications and emergency public information functions, to continue training, and implement said refined plans.

Recommendation 2

“The Board of Supervisors and appropriate city jurisdictions require their respective emergency agencies to pass emergency information to adjacent jurisdictions and the Office of Emergency Services without delay.”

The Board agrees with this recommendation and it has been implemented.

OES is directed to continue its efforts of improved incident emergency communication as previously discussed.

Finding 3

“No single public emergency services agency has accepted the responsibility for educating the public about the actions the public must take to access emergency service communications or what information the public can expect from various emergency alert/information systems.”

The Board wholly disagrees with this finding.

Because each city is responsible for their residents' public health & safety, it would not be appropriate, under the current model of each city having their own emergency coordinator, for any one agency to assume the sole responsibility for educating their residents. Recognizing the different programs, OES has led efforts of coordinating public education through OES' Emergency Coordinators' Committee (ECC).

OES has also worked with local foundations to create the "Aware & Prepare Initiative". This OES initiative has provided funding for various emergency programs throughout the Operational Area. Public education programs have been created in Carpinteria, Goleta, UCSB, Buellton, Solvang and Santa Maria. The Spanish speaking population has been educated through the *Listos* program. *Listos* is an emergency education program that provides education in a culturally sensitive manner to increase preparedness within the Spanish-speaking population. These programs have proven very successful and have instructed and educated hundreds of persons in being better prepared which includes emergency actions to take during various alerts and warnings.

Through an Aware & Prepare Initiative-funded project, OES, working with Santa Barbara CITY television and the Public Education Subcommittee of the ECC, is also developing public service announcements for all communities throughout the Operational Area. Besides the PSA project, the Public Education Sub-Committee meets to discuss the programs, to maintain message consistency and to learn from each respective program's successes. While OES or the Board has no statutory authority to force a city to establish an education program in a specific manner, OES and the cities have recognized the benefit of working together on public education.

Recommendation 3a

“The Board of Supervisors designates the Office of Emergency Services as the responsible agency for educating the county's public.”

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

As discussed earlier, while the Board is free to "designate" OES as the "responsible agency for educating the public", there is no statutory authority in doing so except in the unincorporated areas of the county. OES is directed to continue to work with cities and agencies to improve education programs through cooperation and sharing of educational information. Again, through OES' Aware & Prepare program, OES has undertaken a preeminent lead in this area.

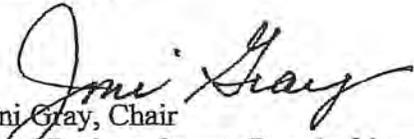
Recommendation 3b

“The Board of Supervisors directs the Office of Emergency Services to fund, subject to the approval of the Board of Supervisors, develop and coordinate permanent ongoing emergency education programs, and then work with cities, school districts, water districts, non-government organizations, broadcast media, public and private utilities to get relevant alert/education information out to the public.”

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

Given the current budget climate, the Board cannot support this recommendation. The Board directs OES to, where possible, develop funding sources to support continued jurisdiction and agency emergency public education and emergency public information efforts, and to assist in overall coordination of education efforts.

Yours Truly,


Joni Gray, Chair
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
Chandra Wallar, County Executive Officer
Michael D. Harris, Emergency Operation Chief
Santa Barbara County Operational Area Council
Bill Brown, Sheriff
Michael Dyer, County Fire Chief