

April 12, 2011

Honorable Arthur A. Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
312 East Cook Street
P.O. Box 5369
Santa Maria, CA 93456-5369

Re: Grand Jury Report entitled "Improving Our Emergency Alert System in the 21st Century

Honorable Judge Garcia,

We have been tasked with responding to Finding #2 and Recommendation #2 of the Grand Jury Report entitled "Improving Our Emergency Alert System in the 21st Century".

Finding 2

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

Response:

We respectfully disagree with this finding relating to communication with neighboring and affected agencies during the Tea Fire and Jesusita Fire.

The following times are documented in our recordings of the dispatch and our CAD system during the Tea Fire which document the timely communications between neighboring agencies:

5:45 pm First Report of Fire transferred from Santa Barbara City Fire Dispatch for mutual aid response (Dispatches for Santa Barbara City Fire Department (STB) and Police Department) Santa Barbara County Dispatch {Dispatches for Sheriff's Department, Santa Barbara County Fire Department (SBC), Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District (CRP) and American Medical Response (AMR)} is also receiving numerous 911 calls regarding the fire.

5:49 pm MFD requests second alarm which includes additional equipment from SBC, STB, CRP, and the United States Forest Service.

At this point, all neighboring agencies have been in communication, are aware of the incident and initiating responses.

5:51 pm MFD has contact with SBC regarding response to the vegetation fire and a separate structure fire incident on Ayala.

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6:00 pm MFD requests Reverse 911 from SBC. Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department sent representatives to the MFD Incident Command Post (ICP) to assist with further evacuation notifications and Reverse 911 notifications.

The Jesusita Fire began outside of our jurisdiction, but we were contacted within minutes of the start of the fire, and remained in constant communication with the Incident Commander and Incident Management Team throughout the event.

We do not feel that it was a lack of communication with our neighbors that slowed information being passed to affected residents, but the time it took to correctly identify and describe the evacuation areas.

Information was initially slower than we would have liked when the evacuation was first initiated. One of the reasons for this was that the language of the areas at risk needed to be carefully crafted to clearly identify the affected areas. This was done cooperatively with the Santa Barbara Sheriff's representatives; however, accurately describing the boundaries took some time.

We have since worked with the Sheriff's Department and all Fire agencies in the Santa Barbara South County to develop pre-designated "evacuation zones" which are strategically mapped and identified. These zones have been preloaded into the Reverse 911 System, and we have written descriptions of each zone, which will reduce the time previously spent trying to accurately describe which areas would be evacuated.

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.

Response:

Since the recent emergencies in our district including the Jesusita and Tea Fires, we have worked to improve our notification system and policies to provide our community with the most up to date information and coordinate with our neighboring agencies.

1. Notifications and communication with neighboring agencies remain the same, as they are a part of our automatic and mutual agreements, and therefore, are part of the initial dispatch for all large incidents.
2. We have established a notification method by which the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Services will receive an email notification any time that our District Operations Center (DOC) is activated. This will be our primary communication tool, however if the information infrastructure / internet capabilities are damaged, we are also able to contact them via Satellite phone. It should then be the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Services that notifies the Board of Supervisors.

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In addition to the requested responses, Montecito Fire would like to comment on another statement in the Grand Jury Report entitled "Improving Our Emergency Alert System in the 21st Century" states:

"The Jury found that none of the emergency agencies interviewed had formulated and executed an effective and ongoing public education program dealing with preparation for actual alerts, or how to obtain follow-up information about how to respond to an emergency alert."

We respectfully disagree with this statement as well. The Montecito Fire Protection District has been involved with educating and informing the community for many years. Free monthly training sessions have been offered through our volunteer organization, MERRAG, including information on preparing for emergencies and information about the entire District's alerting methods.

We include information about our notification systems and training opportunities on our website, AM Radio station 1680, as well as advertisements periodically placed in the Montecito Journal. The notification methods currently in place for Montecito residents include:

- REVERSE 911 –more information at www.sbsheriff.org/reverse911
- NIXLE –Receive email and text messages sent directly to your cell phone during emergencies.
- FACEBOOK – "Like" Montecito Fire on Facebook
- TWITTER – "Follow" Montecito Fire on Twitter
- AMBIENT HOME ALERT RADIO - Delivers up to 90 Db tone and scrolling text to specially programmed radio placed in your home. ADA compliant accessories available for seeing and hearing impaired.
- AM 1680 – Low powered AM radio station managed by Montecito Fire for use during emergencies to broadcast critical public information. Community and preparedness information on a 24/7 loop during non-emergency situations.

We at Montecito Fire understand the importance of getting timely and accurate information out to the public and appreciate the efforts of the Grand Jury in researching this issue. We are committed to working with our community and neighboring agencies to continue improving our notification methods.

Thank you,

Kevin Wallace
Fire Chief