

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER ACTIVATION

SUMMARY

Following the oil spill at Refugio State Beach in May 2015, questions were raised concerning the use and perceived “take over” of the County of Santa Barbara’s (County) Emergency Operations Center (EOC) by a non-governmental entity, Plains All American Pipeline. This is an Activity Report by the 2015-16 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury (Jury) pertaining to the use of the EOC. The Jury found that the activation of the EOC during the oil spill was in compliance with federal, state, and local laws.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the Jury toured the EOC, reviewed documents and media reports, interviewed staff, and attended a public meeting of the County’s Disaster Council.

OBSERVATIONS

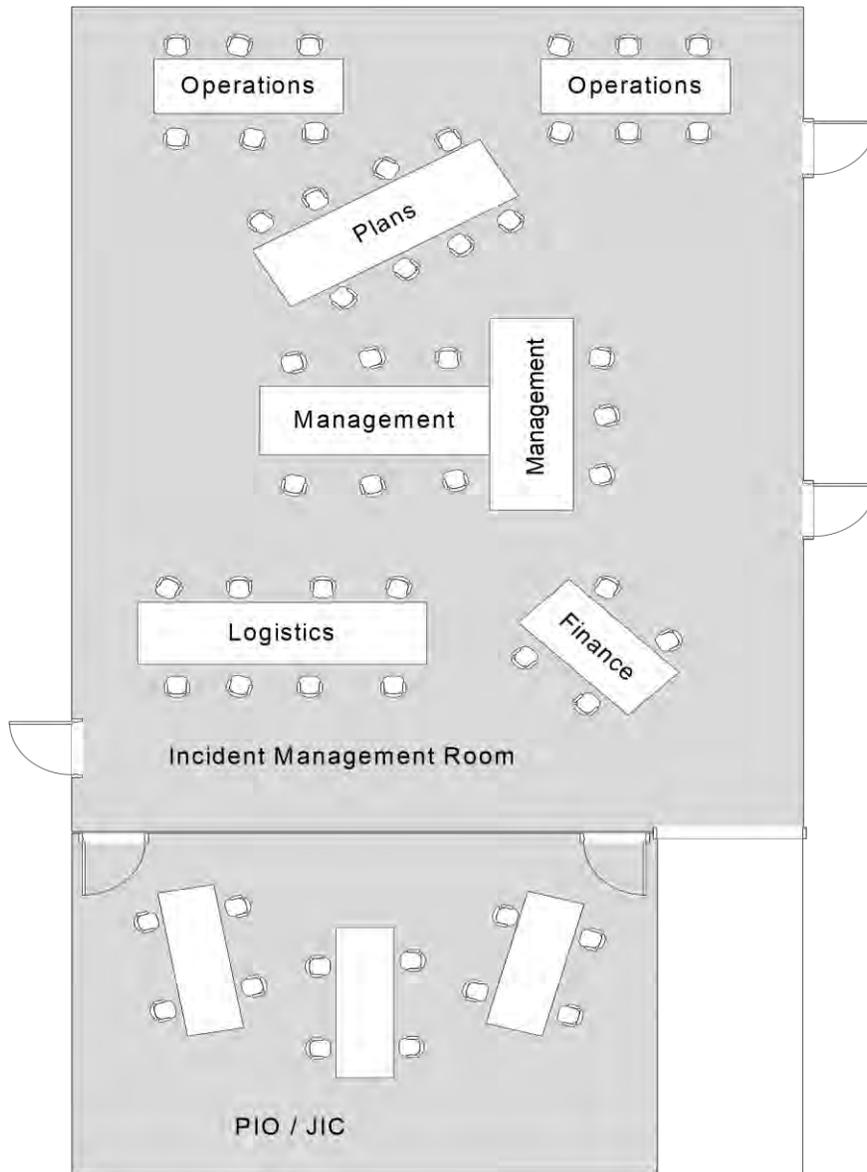
Keeping the public informed is a major function of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) staff at the EOC, located at 4408 Cathedral Oaks Road in Santa Barbara. Emergency 911 calls can be connected to the EOC. Reverse 911 calling can be engaged and staff are in the process of implementing the use of Everbridge in the near future. Everbridge is a mass notification system that can notify people of emergencies by text or email. The EOC is currently monitoring software for an Earthquake Early Warning (EEW) system which will provide vital seconds of advanced warning for those who receive the message on their computer or mobile phone to drop, cover, and hold. The EEW system is being designed to, in the future, stop trains, automatically open garage doors, elevator doors and the doors to fire stations. The national emergency announcement system equipment (seen and/or heard over radio and television) is also housed at the EOC. EOC staff conducted a Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment concerning the coastline and determined that installation of warning sirens at the beach (like there are in Hawaii and elsewhere) is not necessary. Staff also encourages the public, through press releases and other means, to be prepared for emergencies by maintaining kits in their homes, businesses, and cars. Lastly, the OEM updates its website, <http://countyofsb.org/ceo/oem/>, in near real time with wind, wave, and other advisories.

The EOC is a meeting facility and communications center where County staff and others can work together to manage major emergencies. Coordination of emergency efforts is the primary reason for the existence of the EOC. Types of major emergencies are listed on the EOC website where

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER ACTIVATION

organizational structures are documented in the 254-page *Emergency Management Plan*. The Jury was informed that the plan is in the process of being updated. Policies and guidelines in the plan comply with federal, state, and county emergency protocols that have been established to provide consistency in terminologies, job descriptions, communication paths, and legal requirements. Among other things, the guidelines enumerate the "seats at the table", or agencies involved, depending on the type of emergency. Personnel contact lists for government, media, and supporting private contract agencies are maintained at the EOC. When the EOC is activated, the logistics, operations, finance, fire, law enforcement, and public information functions each has a designated functional area in the EOC incident management room as indicated in the following diagram, obtained from the OEM's *Emergency Management Plan*.

SANTA BARBARA OPERATIONAL AREA EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER DIAGRAM Generalized Emergency Operations Center layout (not to scale)



EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER ACTIVATION

Since its construction in 2011, the EOC has been activated several times to offer support in response to community emergencies such as wildfires and drought emergency declarations. The EOC is also used for training exercises that simulate how County staff, other agencies and first responders will respond to various emergencies such as an earthquake, tsunami, wildfire, flooding, or pandemic influenza. For example, the EOC was activated on November 26, 2013, for an Offshore Platform Security Threat Awareness and Response (OPSTAR) exercise.

Although there are no national requirements for emergency training of elected officials, they are encouraged to participate in training exercises whenever available. In recognition of this fact, the OEM is planning to host two separate training sessions in 2016. Also, in conjunction with the State, OEM is preparing to conduct an oil spill workshop that will include training for elected officials as the response requirements are fundamentally different for that type of disaster. The Jury supports these efforts.

THE REFUGIO OIL SPILL

The most recent EOC activation, on May 21, 2015, was in response to the Plains All American Pipeline oil spill near Refugio State Beach. The activation raised questions about the role of government in the activation and use of the EOC facility. The Jury learned that in this case, the County EOC was acting as a “landlord” to the Unified Command that was formed in response to the oil spill. This operational method is typical of such incidents as mandated by federal, state, and local laws and conforms to the Santa Barbara County Operational Area Oil Spill Contingency Plan (OSCP) <http://countyofsb.org/ceo/asset.c/276>.

The OSCP, which is presently being updated, was prepared in accordance with *Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR)*. It identifies four participants in the Unified Command in the event of a marine oil spill. The participants are the Federal On-Scene Coordinator (FOSC), the State Incident Commander (SIC), the “Responsible Party” (RP), and the County of Santa Barbara, known as the Local On-Scene Coordinator (LOSC). This list of participants is per a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), found on page 43 of the OSCP, between the OEM and the State of California’s Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR). The MOU follows *Title 14 of the CCR* and allows County input into the management of any oil spill within its boundaries.

In the case of the May 2015 oil spill, the RP was Plains All American Pipeline. The principal advantage to having the RP participate as part of the Unified Command is that they are, in most cases, liable for all damages and costs incurred as a result of an oil pollution incident. Having the financially responsible party in the room, “with a checkbook”, can expedite logistical activities and reduce response time. The presence of Plains All American Pipeline in the same room with the federal, state, and local on-scene coordinators is understandable and in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations and plans. In addition, it is also in compliance with the OSCP. Because the spill affected the ocean, the Coast Guard was the lead agency, and FOSC, and had 51% of the vote in the Unified Command. Therefore, the Coast Guard was, in effect, renting the

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER ACTIVATION

EOC from the County during the incident. More information about the Refugio Oil Spill and clean up can be found at: <http://www.refugioresponse.com/go/doc/7258/2522638/>

CONCLUSION

The 2015 – 2016 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury found that the activation of the Emergency Operations Center on May 21, 2015, was done in compliance with the Santa Barbara County Operational Area Oil Spill Contingency Plan and applicable county, state, and federal laws.

Under *California Penal Code Section 933.05* this report does not require a response.