

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

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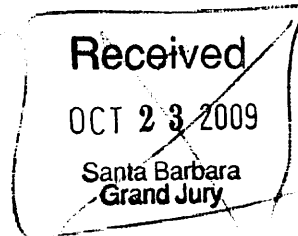
EXECUTIVE OFFICE
OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Received

OCT 16 2009

Santa Barbara
Grand Jury

October 16, 2009



Response

Fletcher Phillips, Foreperson
Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury
Santa Barbara County Courthouse
1500 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

Reference: Follow-up to the 2008-09 Santa Barbara Civil Grand Jury Reports:

2008-09 Report "*Santa Barbara County Emergency Communications – Further Improvement Needed*"
o Recommendation #4

2008-09 Report "*Santa Barbara County Emergency Operations Center; How Many More Delays?*"
o Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
o Emergency Management Software (WebEOC)

Dear Mr. Fletcher and Members of the Civil Grand Jury:

The County Executive Office and the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Services (OES) thank you for your continued interest in emergency management. Since your 2008-09 reports, "*Santa Barbara County Emergency Communications – Further Improvement Needed*" and "*Santa Barbara County Emergency Operations Center; How Many More Delays?*" forward momentum continues in the area of emergency management and serving the public. OES is happy to report back on our efforts in providing effective emergency information to our citizens, the improving management of emergencies through emergency management software and developments towards constructing a permanent emergency operations center (EOC) for the Santa Barbara County Operational Area.

"Santa Barbara County Emergency Communications – Further Improvement Needed"

Recommendation #4, the recommendation which the Grand Jury is requesting following-up information, stated, "*That the County develop an email system which would cover all residents in the County.*" That recommendation has been acted upon in a manner beyond that of the Grand Jury's email suggestion.

Status: Implemented. Public information campaign in development.

When providing support and management of an emergency or disaster one of the critical areas is communicating timely and accurate information to the public.

Providing information to citizens when they are at home with access to their televisions or home computers, or providing information to persons who have been evacuated and have access to AM/FM radios and cellular phones is critical. Both the CEO and OES believe that providing email is an effective method of communicating. Email can provide significant detail where text messaging often has limited capacity. When persons are evacuated however, many lack the ability to retrieve their emails by way of having a computer and therefore may lack obtaining key information. Therefore, OES continues to focus on delivering information in multiple platforms; particularly platforms that are accessible from cellular phones when persons have been evacuated or don't have immediate access to a PC.

In March 2009 the OES established a Twitter account and initiated testing of messaging. Testing evaluated system reliability (up-time), delivery time and the ability to view in various mobile platforms. OES' Twitter account (twitter.com/SBCountyOES) can be viewed by a desktop computer and a web-enabled cellular telephone. This allows persons unable to retrieve their emails, to obtain real-time messaging from OES or partnering agencies. Persons not self-registered for OES' main messaging site and are evacuated without a PC, can be directed to the Twitter site to view real-time published information coming from emergency officials.

In September 2009, OES reached an agreement with Nixle, LLC, to house an emergency messaging site for OES. The site (<http://local.nixle.com/santa-barbara-county-office-of-emergency-services/>) allows for subscribers to select the type and method of messaging they wish to receive (except for emergency "Alerts" which always generate a text message). The manager who generates the message can also target a geographical area to avoid sending messages to persons in distant unaffected areas of the Operational Area. This reduces "message burnout" for unintended recipients. The OES site can deliver messages by email, text and because it generates a Twitter message, the messages can be viewed by a web-enabled cellular phone.

In September 2009, OES developed a partnership with Nixle, LLC, to provide information via email, text messaging and with simulcast information going to Twitter.com/SBCountyOES. The Nixle interface also allows for subscribers to decide what information they wish to receive: "Advisory" messages, "Community" messages or "Traffic" messages. All subscribers to the emergency messaging system through Nixle must receive "Alert" messages via email and text. OES is also extending to other agencies and jurisdictions access to the new messaging system in order to provide a single emergency messaging site throughout the Operational Area.

"Santa Barbara County Emergency Operations Center; How Many More Delays?"

Since its response to the Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury, OES has continued to strengthen the emergency and disaster response systems for the Operational Area. In July 2008 the Board of Supervisors directed staff to proceed with making the EOC ready for any potential funding that may occur. As a result of community interest, the recognition that the current EOC did not meet the needs of the community and that another "interim EOC" was not a viable solution, various philanthropic entities partnered with the Board of Supervisors to provide funding to build a permanent facility. As a result of this partnership, the Board directed staff to proceed with an EOC bid process and return to the Board for a departmental hearing for further direction.

Currently the County is soliciting vendor pre-qualification documents, staff is working with the philanthropic partners and will return with EOC project recommendations in December 2009.

Recommendation 5: *"That the Board of Supervisors authorize funds for the purchase of Web EOC."*

Status: Homeland Security funding secured. System procurement (software and hardware) underway.

In its response OES disagreed with the Grand Jury's recommendation in that the recommendation solely called for the Board to use County funds to purchase emergency management software. In late September 2009 the OES was notified by Homeland Security officials that the Operational Area had been awarded funding to implement an emergency management software and new computer system upgrade purchase.

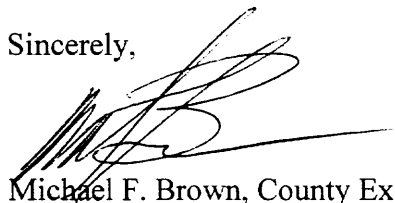
As has been described to the Grand Jury previously, when emergency staff are called into the EOC to activate EOC systems, in addition to having to provide basic set-up, one of the problematic processes was plugging-in and starting the numerous desktop computers within the EOC. This process often took two or more hours and resulted in delays in allowing EOC to begin their duties.

In recognition of this, OES applied for and received Homeland Security funding to obtain new computer system that will always be "live", will have multiple back-ups, a robust wireless interface and direct Internet access should local networks fail. The emergency management software will also be provided for all jurisdictions that compose the Operational Area (e.g., incorporated cities and some special districts). OES is convening a technical and users group to establish a system that meets the needs of the Operational Area users. Implementation is projected for the spring of 2010.

As you will note, the Office of Emergency Services has, and will continue to, improve systems that meet the needs of the emergency management team in supporting the field response and the management of emergencies as required by the Operational Area EOC.

Should you need any additional information, we would welcome you contacting us.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Brown, County Executive Officer

cc: Chair Centeno and Honorable Members of the Board
Honorable Judge J. William McLafferty
Terri Nisich, Assistant CEO
Michael D. Harris, Emergency Operations Chief