



COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA
COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE

OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

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May 12, 2011

Honorable Arthur A. Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
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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 Office of Emergency Services (OES) wishes to thank the Civil Grand Jury for its continued interest in emergency management. OES was gratified to read the Grand Jury's recognition that, "*The Jury found a county-wide comprehensive plan for conveying information to the public is in place in the Santa Barbara County's Office of Emergency Services (OES).*" As a result of incident experiences, OES staff worked hard with local public information officers, agencies and jurisdictions to develop the "Public Information Annex" to the emergency management plan for the county. OES has conducted training towards the plan and is updating and refining the plan based on participant input.

In accordance with the Grand Jury's direction, answers 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."

OES agrees with the finding.

Reverse 9-1-1® is designed to provide emergency information to a geographic area when communication systems such as land-based telephones and cell phones are operational. The need to script a Reverse 9-1-1® message while simultaneously plotting a geographic area to send the message can

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take time. Therefore, OES, the Sheriffs Office and other agencies/jurisdictions have utilized Reverse 9-1-1® as just one communication tool. Field staff, local media and social media are part of the system that continues to work while a Reverse 9-1-1® mission is being planned and executed.

Recommendation Ib

"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.

This recommendation is directed to the Board of Supervisors (Board) however, the Grand Jury has required a response from OES. OES would inform the Board that it does not support this recommendation. OES is proud of its strong relationship with local media. Television, radio and internet media outlets have been meeting with OES prior to the Grand Jury's report. OES and the media are working together on how to communicate effectively based on lessons learned. OES has proposed revisiting the existing memorandum of understanding (MOU) with media outlets in order to increase the number of participants and clarify responsibilities. OES' position is that all media outlets be provided information during emergencies as the public access the media outlet of their choice and preference. OES will highlight the MOU "members" on OES' website as MOU participants have formally agreed to "activate" their operations at the request of OES.

Reverse 9-1-1® is used for a variety of circumstances and such a broad statement as notifying the media "any time the Reverse 9-1-1® is activated" will not be implemented. During an incident where there are threats to the public, e.g., fire, hazardous materials spill, active shooter, etcetera, it would be the intent to notify the public through parallel systems, such as the media, web sites and other emergency messaging systems, while Reverse 9-1-1® is being prepared for execution. However, activating the local media for instances in which Reverse 9-1-1® is being used to alert a neighborhood for a lost or missing person at, for example, 3AM, does little to enhance response or knowledge to the situation. The Sheriffs Office has repeatedly demonstrated their partnership with the local media in situations such as the latter.

Finally, Reverse 9-1-1® is a tool not under direct control of OES. The Sheriffs Office often uses Reverse 9-1-1® in partnership with OES. However, the Sheriffs Office has also used Reverse 9-1-1® without OES' involvement; such as elderly lost residents. While the relationship between the two agencies in regard to Reverse 9-1-1® during emergencies is appropriate, it would be inappropriate to dictate to OES when it would use the resources beyond its authorities.

Recommendation Ic

"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.

This recommendation is from the Grand Jury to the Board. OES has been required by the Grand Jury for a response. OES would advise the Board that this recommendation not be implemented.

OES believes that using multiple communication paths through various media providers is a prudent method of communicating with the public. Use of radio, television, internet-based providers, OES' text/email system (Nixle.com), OES' social media site (Facebook, Twitter and Flickr), Reverse 9-1-1® are appropriate. All links, including to the Sheriffs Reverse 9-1-1 ® are available at countyofsb.org/ceo/oes.

Each individual jurisdiction also has the authority to develop and manage their own emergency communication platforms. While OES has encouraged the use of similar systems, 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 Sheriffs Office Reverse 9-1-1® system. If jurisdictions use their own system, OES' goal is that jurisdictions coordinate their use. OES cannot however, direct a city to implement a particular system.

Recommendation Id

"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.

Although the recommendation addresses the Board, OES has been required by the Grand Jury for a response.

As discussed in Recommendation Ic, 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 included representatives from throughout the county. This included 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.

OES partially disagrees with this finding.

During an emergency providing information to the public occurs at different levels. At small incidents, such as a house fire, small hazardous materials incident or at the scene of a law enforcement incident, public information may be handled by on-scene Public Information Officer (PIO). In the initial stages, as an incident grows in complexity the incident PIO may still have the predominant lead in getting out information to the media and public. As the PIO is working with local media, the incident commander is ensuring that any persons who require immediate life-saving information, such as evacuation orders, are receiving that information by field incident staff. Even during the very initial stages in which an HOC is activated, the on-scene incident PIO is leading the effort in publishing information.

OES strongly believes that residents who find themselves in an area posing immediate danger, receive timely and effective information from incident commanders in order to take necessary life-saving actions. This includes those situations in which field staff (such as individual deputies) have unilaterally made evacuation decisions based on rapidly changing situations such as unexpected fire spread.

OES, the agencies and jurisdictions have recognized the difficulties of smooth information flow between the incident level and the EOC. Working together they have taken steps to improve that flow in plan development, training and plan updates from that training; a quality improvement cycle. It is important to remember that while persons want information instantaneously, OES and the first response agencies must ensure that published information is validated by dependable sources. If an agency published information that is erroneous, credibility, panic and potentially a risk to public safety may occur.

As discussed earlier, OES, working with its emergency and jurisdictional partners developed and is refining the "Public Information Annex". This plan acknowledges the need to link incident and EOC PIO roles and responsibilities. Training, exercising and ongoing plan review has assisted in the information flow between the field and the EOC.

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.

OES agrees with this recommendation and it has been implemented.

OES would recommend to the Board its support of this recommendation (OES' response is also required by the Grand Jury although the recommendation is made to the Board).

As discussed previously, OES has been leading efforts of improved incident emergency communication. Repeated meetings with members of local media management, discussions with agency PIOs - including their participation and input into the Public Information Annex -training of PIOs and implementing improved communication systems, have enhanced the ability of agencies and jurisdiction to work together on emergency public information during incidents. The strongest move forward has been the combined efforts of agencies and jurisdictions to fully understand the respective roles of the incident/field PIO and the EOC PIOs.

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.

OES partially disagrees with this finding.

In 2007 OES partnered with the Orfalea Fund and Witt Associates to create the "Aware & Prepare Initiative". This initiative has provided funding for various emergency programs throughout the county (referred to as the "Operational Area"). Public education programs have been created in Carpinteria, Goleta, UCSB, Buellton, Solvang and Santa Maria. These programs have proven very successful and have instructed and educated hundreds of persons in being better prepared; including emergency actions to take during various alerts and warnings.

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 lead efforts of coordinating public education through OES' Emergency Coordinators' Committee (ECC).

The ECC, which meets quarterly, is comprised of representatives of each city and several agencies. The ECC is formed into several subcommittees that provide recommendations to OES on a variety of subject matters. One ECC sub-committee is the "Public Education Sub-Committee".

With each city or jurisdiction developing education programs, 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 3 a

The Board of Supervisors designate 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.

An OES response is required by the Grand Jury while the recommendation is made to the Board. OES would recommend to the Board that this recommendation not be implemented.

As discussed in Finding 3 above, 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, the cities and agencies currently work together to improve education programs through cooperation and sharing of public education programs. Again, through OES' Aware & Prepare program, OES has undertaken a preeminent lead in this area.

Recommendation 3b

The Board of Supervisors direct 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.

An OES response is required by the Grand Jury while the recommendation is made to the Board. OES would recommend to the Board that this recommendation not be implemented.

Given the current budget climate, OES cannot support this recommendation. Instead OES is looking to 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.

Recommendation 3c

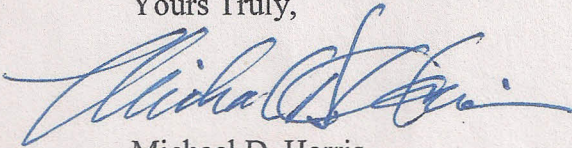
The Office of Emergency Services develop and implement a compliance program to monitor alert/inform emergency education efforts.

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

“Compliance” would indicate an authority over cities or independent jurisdictions in regard to emergency education efforts. OES and the Board have no such authority. Continuing efforts, as previously discussed, are more likely to yield positive overall results.

Again thank you for your continuing interests in public safety. OES is proud of the accomplishments made towards better alerting and warning of the public, coordination with our local media partners and cooperation amongst local PIOs.

Yours Truly,



Michael D. Harris
County Executive Office
Office of Emergency Services

Cc: Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

Chandra Wallar, County Executive Officer

Santa Barbara County Operational Area Council

William F. Brown, Sheriff