



ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

July 15, 2019

Honorable Kirk Nakamura
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

RE: Response to 2018-19 Orange County Grand Jury report, *Emergency Public Information-Should I Stay or Should I Go?*

Dear Judge Nakamura:

In accordance with Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, enclosed please find the response to the 2018-19 Orange County Grand Jury report, *Emergency Public Information-Should I Stay or Should I Go?*

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald A. Barnes". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Don Barnes
Sheriff-Coroner

cc: Grand Jury Foreperson
Members, Orange County Board of Supervisors
Frank Kim, County Executive Officer

Orange County Sheriff's Department
Response to Findings and Recommendations
2018-2019 Orange County Grand Jury Report
"Emergency Public Information – Should I Stay or Should I Go?"

FINDINGS

F1

Lack of coordination among the involved agencies caused Emergency Public Information sent out about evacuations during the Canyon 2 fire to be inconsistent, and confused residents.

Response: Agrees with finding.

Fast moving emergency events, such as wildland fires, are extremely difficult to manage given the rapid development, cascading impacts, and the various information barriers and sources. These emergencies always suffer from an information vacuum and the demand from the public is for instantaneous information. Information is never complete or linear for the Incident Commanders on scene, especially when the impact area cannot be fully seen. Additionally, there are major challenges associated with multiple information sources including general network and news media as well as social media distributing information in the early stages of an emergency. Some of this information may not have been validated by those sources. Public safety agencies have a responsibility to only release truthful, accurate and validated information. Public safety agencies also have a responsibility to work together to address mid-emergency information problems and address them so that the community will receive clear, factual, and detailed information. Ultimately it must be noted that community members did take action based on first responders' direction to evacuate and no lives were lost in either the Canyon II or Holy Fires.

F2

Some emergency management personnel, tasked with creating and disseminating Emergency Public Information, in a rapidly-evolving, multijurisdictional emergency did not fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

Response: Disagrees with finding.

For the Orange County Sheriff's Department and the Orange County Emergency Operations Center, fully trained and experienced Public Information Officers were placed in corresponding roles and they worked to resolve the inevitable information issues that arise during any emergency event.

F3

No training standards for Public Information Officers exist and there are no formal written protocols for issuance of mass notification, including required training on the use of mass notification systems.

Response: Disagrees with finding.

This finding blends two issues and each will be taken separately.

Public Information Officer (PIO) training standards do exist through organizations such as the National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG), California Peace Officers and Standards Training (POST), California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency Emergency Management Institute (FEMA EMI). It is expected that all field PIOs assigned to a wildland fire incident possess the certifications and qualifications to fill this role according to the NWCG. In an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) environment, it is up to each jurisdiction to ensure properly trained individuals fill roles for their jurisdiction. In Orange County, only seasoned and EOC Trained PIOs are able to fill this role.

In the County of Orange, Public Information Officers are end users to Alert and Warning mass notification systems and instead manage social media, media interviews, and information releases. These are coordinated with mass notification system launches of AlertOC messages and the Wireless Emergency Alert system (WEA). AlertOC and WEA messages are launched by separate, fully trained emergency response personnel. The AlertOC system is used in conjunction with the existing Memorandum of Understanding which includes protocols for system use. The WEA system is bound by system requirements for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS).

F4

The County's vendor for the AlertOC mass notification system had not updated its GIS mapping software, so some residents in newer neighborhoods did not receive an AlertOC message during the Holy Jim fire.

Response: Disagrees with the finding.

A mapping problem with the Everbridge emergency notification system was identified on June 5, 2018 following the Aliso Fire which caused newly built structures to not receive alerts. At that time, the County immediately notified the software vendor and requested resolution of the issue. The identified issue of the Everbridge software pointing to an out of date geocoder was resolved post-Aliso fire and before Holy Fire. Records show that the issue was resolved on June 25, 2018.

F5

The lack of a standardized written protocol for Alerts and Warnings decreases the ability of the County and its Operational Area jurisdictions to speak with one voice when it comes to alerting the public during emergencies.

Response: Partially agrees with finding.

Alert and Warning is the responsibility of each local government jurisdiction, falling mainly to law enforcement personnel. Both the Canyon II and Holy Wildland fires were

multijurisdictional and managed through Unified Command. Alert and Warning can be one voice when operating effectively, and must be coordinated with all responding agencies with jurisdiction over the land and population. Each agency retains responsibility for its own population and if information or alert and warning efforts are falling short, then response agencies should engage in fixing this issue.

The County of Orange and Orange County Operational Area are currently engaged in producing the Alert and Warning Plan which will expand upon previous hazard specific alert and warning efforts such as those included in the Tsunami Annex, various Post Fire Debris Flow Plans, and the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station Plan.

F6

The outdated hotline telephone technology at the County Emergency Operations Center cannot track caller metrics, so staffing decisions are made based on observing the length of time between incoming phone calls.

Response: Partially agrees with finding

The County Emergency Operations Center employs the WebEOC system to assist Public Information Hotline staff in tracking calls into the Hotline with call type, caller location, and issue resolution. Additionally County Telephone Services has the capability of measuring call volume, dropped calls, and similar information. Augmentation of the hotline system is welcome if additional funding can be assigned.

F7

During the Canyon 2 fire, procedures allowing some hotline workers to pass road closures were ineffective, which led to a shortage of operators during the first day of the fire.

Response: Disagrees with finding.

For the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), personnel safety is an extremely high priority. During the Canyon II Fire, California Highway Patrol field resources closed access to the Emergency Operations Center on Santiago Canyon Road for all responders for a time when it was unsafe to travel on this road. Fire directly impacted Santiago Canyon Road, burning telephone poles and forcing the de-energization of the local Southern California Edison circuit.

Responding Public Information Hotline staff were stopped from proceeding into a hazardous area, which maintained their safety and stopped the creation of additional rescue situations for public safety responders. When it was safe to proceed, staff were admitted through the road closure and were able to access the EOC.

All EOC response personnel are trained that they must have a County Identification Badge to be granted access to the EOC, and even then will be granted admittance only when safe.

The County Public Information Hotline shares information with 211OC to ensure there is a hotline redundancy. Additionally, the Sheriff's Department and Fire Authority Dispatch Centers also continue answering emergency calls throughout any ongoing incident.

F8

Some hotline operators are not current on the use of the software for logging incoming phone calls, thus decreasing their efficiency.

Response: Partially agrees with finding

The County of Orange trains Emergency Operations Center responders on the WebEOC Hotline Board to track calls in advance of an emergency, but not all responders are available at the time of an emergency. Thus, some qualified, professional emergency response personnel are called into service and "just in time training" takes place. Hotline call takers are supported by experienced supervisors.

When there is a deficit of trained hotline call takers, the first resource that is drawn upon is the Orange County Sheriff's Department professional staff. These staff members regularly work in a stressful environment, are able to handle life safety emergency information, and readily adapt to the WebEOC system.

Other jurisdictional public information hotlines may not employ the WebEOC Hotline board and this may be an area for growth.

F9

The County and interviewed cities do not seek sufficient public feedback of the perceptions of effectiveness of the Emergency Public Information.

Response: Disagrees with finding.

The County of Orange has historically gathered community feedback through post emergency town hall meetings, community member emails, phone calls into County agencies, as well as social media channels. These feedback options are ongoing and Orange County Sheriff's Department representatives are responsive to community member contacts by working to resolve issues rapidly. Survey instruments will be reviewed as a possible tool following major emergency responses.

F10

The lack of standardized emergency management terminology among the various jurisdictions within Orange County causes delays and confusion in the dissemination of Emergency Public Information.

Response: Partially agrees with finding

The issue of standard terminology creating a barrier in the dissemination of emergency public information is an issue that involves a local, state and federal solution. While the County of Orange and Orange County Operational Area jurisdictions have met and agreed upon common terminology for the Evacuation Annex to the Orange County and Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan, both the Canyon II and Holy Fires involved agencies at the state and federal level which created complexities because those agencies were unfamiliar with the Orange County plans. The County of Orange will continue to voice the need for common terminology and work to address these issues mid-incident for clarity for the community.

F11

Orange County jurisdictions and the California Highway Patrol lack a joint plan for evacuation routes, thus evacuations can be chaotic, creating increased potential for danger to residents.

Response: Agrees with finding

Representatives with the California Highway Patrol (CHP) will be added to working group distribution lists to include the Evacuation Working Group, the Annual County of Orange Unified Command Meeting and other emergency response plans which necessitate coordination with CHP. Additionally jurisdictions will be encouraged to coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions and include the CHP in their plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R2

By December 31, 2019, using the authority derived from R1 (above), the Emergency Operations Center should establish specific minimum standards/expectations with regard to coordination and dissemination of Emergency Public Information that follow SEMS guidelines, by which committed cities must comply for multijurisdictional emergencies. (F1, F5, F10)

Response: The recommendation is currently being implemented.

The County of Orange and the Orange County Operational Area employ three supporting emergency plans which address this recommendation: The Evacuation Annex, the Joint Information System Annex and the Alert and Warning Plan (currently in development). All three documents will be reviewed with regard to this recommendation and appropriate enhancements will be incorporated to address standards, best practices, and lessons learned.

City jurisdictions have the responsibilities to set their own standards and create their own emergency plans and annexes.

R3

By September 30, 2019, the County Emergency Operations Center, the six cities interviewed by the Grand Jury and Orange County Fire Authority should adopt a standardized written protocol for issuance of mass notifications and require training on their software systems, whether the WEA service, AlertOC or any other system is utilized. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5)

Response: The recommendation is currently being implemented.

The County of Orange and the Orange County Operational Area began work on the Alert and Warning Plan in February 2019. The Alert and Warning Plan will expand current written protocols for emergency mass notification, training requirements, and use of all alert and warning systems. The comprehensive and collaborative Alert and Warning Working Group will complete the Alert and Warning Plan, obtain review from several multi-jurisdictional and multi-discipline groups and then pursue plan approval in November 2019 from the established Disaster Councils. Though this Plan will miss the deadline of September 30, 2019, the additional time is needed to fully develop a final product that will assist agencies in navigating the complex environment of public emergency alert and warning.

R4

By September 30, 2019, the six cities interviewed by the Grand Jury should pre-select facilities with sufficient technical capability and of various sizes that are readily accessible to all authorized personnel for use as potential Joint Information Centers so they can be activated in a timely manner. (F1)

Response: Recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The County of Orange supports city planning through listing potential Joint Information Center (JIC) locations in Joint Information System (JIS) Annex. This list can be expanded with locations that individual city jurisdictions have designated. Jurisdictions always have the responsibility to approve use of the facility during an emergency response. The County of Orange will request JIC locations from all cities in the County by September 30, 2019.

R5

By September 30, 2019, the County Emergency Operations Center should modernize its hotline telephone technology. (F6)

Response: Recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The County of Orange will research options for telephone technology upgrades and funding. Due to budgeting and purchasing restrictions, the September 30, 2019 deadline will not be met. This will become a long term objective for facility upgrades.

R6

By September 30, 2019, the County Emergency Operations Center should ensure hotline personnel maintain current training and are provided appropriate physical access during emergencies. (F7, F8)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

The County of Orange maintains regularly scheduled training classes for all Emergency Operations Center (EOC) positions. This training will continue, including the training of Public Information Hotline responders. County of Orange EOC personnel will use “just in time training” as necessary, but will aim for staffing hotline positions with previously trained Public Information Hotline responders. Hotline call takers will continue to be supported by experienced supervisors.

Other jurisdictional public information hotlines may not employ the WebEOC Hotline board and this may be an area for growth.

Regarding access to the Orange County EOC, personnel will continue to be required to possess current agency identification and be advised of reporting procedures. If access to the EOC is unsafe, personnel will not be permitted to access the facility and redundant hotline resources will be employed.

R7

By September 30, 2019, The Orange County Sheriff’s Department and each interviewed city’s Emergency Management Division should adopt a proactive process by which residents impacted by an emergency can easily provide feedback regarding their experience with Emergency Public Information, such as by telephone, mail-in, and/or online surveys. (F9)

Response: Recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The County of Orange will research options for effective survey instruments for proactive community feedback. Due to budgeting and purchasing restrictions, the September 30, 2019 deadline will not be met. This will become a long term objective for community engagement. Additionally, this will be incorporated into the Alert and Warning Plan and the JIS Annex. Jurisdictions will be responsible for surveying their own residents.

R8

By September 30, 2019, a task force, made up of representatives from all Operational Area jurisdictions, public safety Public Information Officers and state public safety professionals, such as California Highway Patrol, should be created to develop an emergency operations plan for large, wide-spread disasters. (F11)

Response: Recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

Representatives with the California Highway Patrol (CHP) will be added to working group distribution lists to include the Evacuation Working Group, the Annual County of Orange Unified Command Meeting and other emergency response plans which necessitate coordination with CHP. Additionally jurisdictions will be encouraged to coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions and include the CHP in their plans. These actions will be taken by September 30, 2019.

R9

By September 30, 2019, the Orange County Sheriff's Department should seek, at a minimum, semi-annual updates on AlertOC vendor software and concurrently request regular updates on its capabilities. (F4)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

The County of Orange, Sheriff's Department holds bi-weekly meetings with the AlertOC vendor to resolve data and system issues and to receive training on the system. The current vendor for the AlertOC system also provides immediate notifications for system issues, outages, or enhancements. Requirements for future vendor contracts which support the AlertOC system will include details specifying notification by the vendor of any system issues which could cause an interruption of service for any community member.