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July 20, 2012

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The Honorable Thomas J. Borris, Presiding Judge
Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

BREA
ROY MOORE
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RE: Grand Jury Report "A Study in Little Known Services"

DANA POINT
STEVEN H. WEINBERG
FOUNTAIN VALLEY
CHERYL BROTHERS
FULLERTON

Dear Judge Borris:

BRUCE WHITAKER
GARDEN GROVE
MARK ROSEN
HUNTINGTON BEACH
JOE CARCHIO

Thank you for giving the Orange County Vector Control District the opportunity to comment on the Grand Jury Report "A Study in Little Known Services." The following are the responses addressing the Grand Jury findings/conclusions and recommendations pertaining to the Orange County Vector Control District.

IRVINE
DR. STEVEN CHOI
HABRA
JAMES GOMEZ

GRAND JURY FINDINGS/CONCLUSIONS:

LA PALMA
STEVE HWANGBO
LAGUNA BEACH
TONI ISEMAN

F1. The field staff of OCVCD has to deal with older technology in dispatching, reporting and coordinating their activities. This requires extra time dedicated to formalizing reports. Acquiring current technology that links databases would lessen the time spent in the office and allow more time in the field, better serving the community. (R1)

LAGUNA HILLS
JOEL LAUTENSCHLEGER
LAGUNA NIGUEL
ROBERT MING
LAGUNA WOODS

RESPONSE: OCVCD agrees wholly. The District has been exploring various software and hardware solutions to replace the current technology. At this time the appropriate replacement software has not been found. The District will continue to investigate a solution.

MILTON W. ROBBINS
LAKE FOREST
MARCIA RUDOLPH

F2. The laboratories of the Agricultural Commissioner, Health Care Agency, and Vector Control have little inter-relationship with respect to their functions and specialized equipment. Little or no communication exists among the labs for sharing of disease information impacting the public. (R2)

LOS ALAMITOS
GERRI GRAHAM-MEJIA
MISSION VIEJO
JOHN PAUL LEDESMA

RESPONSE: OCVCD disagrees partially with the statement regarding the "...little inter-relationship..." concerning the District's functions and specialized equipment.

NEWPORT BEACH
LESLIE DAIGLE
ORANGE
DENIS BILODEAU

PLACENTIA
CHAD P. WANKE

RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA
GEORGE P. GUTMAN
SAN CLEMENTE

JIM DAHL
SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO
LAURA FREESE
SANTA ANA

CECILIA AGUINAGA
SEAL BEACH
MICHAEL LEVITT

STANTON
AL ETHANS
TUSTIN

AL MURRAY
VILLA PARK
BILL MACALONEY

ESTMINSTER
FRANK FRY, JR.
YORBA LINDA
JIM WINDER

COUNTY OF ORANGE
JOHN M. W. MOORLACH, C.P.A.
DISTRICT MANAGER
MICHAEL G. HEARST

"An Independent Special District Serving Orange County Since 1947"

The mission of the Orange County Vector Control District is to provide the citizens of Orange County with the highest level of protection from vectors and vector-borne diseases.

OCVCD disagrees wholly with the statement "Little or no communication exists among the labs for sharing of disease information impacting the public." OCVCD has bi-weekly contact with the Health Care Agency and frequent contact with the Agricultural Commissioner's laboratory on an as needed basis.

F3. The OCVCD does not exercise all of its abatement rights under the California Health and Safety Code sections 2060-2067. It fails to issue citations and levy fines for violations of the codes against property owners, including banks, who own foreclosed property. Issuing fines could lead to recouping costs of remediating unattended property and lower assessments to all other taxpayers. (R3)

RESPONSE: OCVCD disagrees wholly. The District does have abatement procedures, civil fines, and inspection and abatement warrants available for use. We have provided significant training to our field personnel on these procedures, and they are a resource of last resort if needed. However, the District has been very successful with obtaining cooperation and/or in applying low cost abatement efforts on many of the sites needing correction. The costs of the legal proceedings are only justified in the most significant cases, and we believe that we have better served our constituents by keeping our legal costs down. We continue to evaluate our options, however, and we have urged all cities to adopt a property registration ordinance since abandoned and foreclosed properties have greater issues than vectors.

F4. The OCVCD maintains a database of over 3,000 abandoned swimming pools throughout Orange County that are basically unattended breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Considerable time is devoted to treating and following up on the condition of these pools. (R3)

RESPONSE: OCVCD agrees.

F5. The OCVCD has the largest Board of Trustees of any independent special district in Orange County. Thirty-five members represent all the cities and the County Board of Supervisors. Meeting for an hour monthly to discuss and vote on district business presented to them by the staff does not appear to provide adequate oversight. Thirty-five Trustees is an overly large amount for the task of efficient, cost effective governance of this district. (R5)

RESPONSE: OCVCD disagrees partially. The composition of the Board of Trustees is determined by the California Health and Safety Code. Orange County is comprised of 34 cities and the County. Since no examples of inadequate oversight are given, it is difficult to respond to this finding.

F6. The OCVCD's Communications Department is striving to provide better service to the public and improve its public outreach. Communication and public outreach needs to continue improving. The OCVCD website has no ability to place threat warnings on cities websites. (R5)

RESPONSE: OCVCD disagrees partially. The Communications Department will continue to improve its public outreach effort. The District issues threat warnings and notices to all public agencies, cities, and the County; these are posted on the District website when appropriate. The District does not have the authority or ability to post directly on any agency website.

F7. Currently the overwhelming majority of the citizens of Orange County have little or no knowledge of the OCVCD. In most cases they do not know what the vector control mission entails or how it serves the community. (R6)

RESPONSE: OCVCD agrees.

F8. Based on a survey conducted by OCVCD in 2009, the district earned a 94 % approval rating from citizens who had used their services. The 2011-2012 Grand Jury surveyed prospective jury members in August 2011. Only 17% of the respondents surveyed have ever contacted OCVCD. Of those that had used OCVCD, 75% were satisfied with the response. (R6)

RESPONSE: OCVCD agrees.

F9. The OCVCD Inspectors are State certified, dedicated and knowledgeable. They perform their services well. The OCVCD is a well-run and well-resourced operation fulfilling its core mission. OCVCD conducts effective and efficient day-to-day operations.

RESPONSE: OCVCD agrees. Thank you for your interest in the District.

GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1. OCVCD's Director of Communications should develop and acquire hardware and software to eliminate the time consuming data acquisition and report writing input that is currently required.

RESPONSE: The recommendation requires further analysis. The Director of Communications has and will continue to explore software and hardware solutions. However, off-the-shelf software solutions do not currently exist. Current legislation and new regulations have added to the data management requirements. These new requirements combined with the District's broad approach to vector control have made it difficult to find a suitable solution.

R2. OCVCD should take the lead in forming a coalition with the Agricultural Commissioners Agency and the Health Care Agency to explore sharing information.

RESPONSE: The recommendation has been implemented. OCVCD scheduled and attended a meeting on July 3rd between the Agricultural Commissioner's office and the Health Care Agency. The three agencies agreed to continue communications and to explore opportunities for improving inter-agency collaboration.

R3. OCVCD should start exercising the authority granted to it in the Health and Safety Code and issue citations to individuals, real estate agencies and banks that refuse to maintain swimming pools under their control.

RESPONSE: The recommendation requires further analysis. The District has been analyzing the costs and benefits of abatement proceedings. The District has been working with cities and the County to identify problem properties. District policy is to work with property owners to educate them about vector control issues and in turn create advocates instead of adversaries. The District's concern is that the cost of exercising its authority to levy fines would likely exceed the money

recovered and delay the vector control efforts. We will specifically be reviewing whether more can be done with property registration and civil fines.

R4. The Board of Trustees should explore downsizing itself to a manageable group of appointed citizens, not elected officials. The Board should consider membership along the lines of the Supervisorial Districts with an appointed representative from each district. Furthermore, the appointees should have some background in biology or related health careers.

RESPONSE: The recommendation will not be implemented. A vector control district is a creature of the state, and state legislation establishes how our Board is constituted. The California Health and Safety Code, Division 3, Chapter 1, Section 2021, states that each city may appoint a trustee, as well as one trustee appointment by the County. Although some flexibility may be allowed, the Board has to date determined to leave the composition of the Board as it is. While the Grand Jury has called for appointed officials with technical backgrounds as the governing body, a majority of the Board are of the opinion that elected officials better serve the citizens, and therefore, the Board is comprised of mostly elected officials today. Although the Grand Jury believes that the current Board is unmanageable, in actuality, the Board is highly participative, and meetings are run very efficiently. The meetings are generally two hours in length once a month, and many times there are spirited discussions and split votes on policy decisions. This composition seems to provide more representation for each community, and the cost for such broad representation is not great in that each member only earns \$100 per month. (The OCVCD Board is half the cost of one 5-member water or sewer board that cost \$6,600 per month). There are two ways to reduce the size of the Board: 1) Change the California Health and Safety Code; or 2) Cities can choose to not appoint a representative as long as the number of trustees remains five or more.

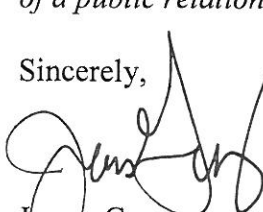
R5. OCVCD should explore teaming with the Webmasters and the County CEO Information Technology, to ensure immediate posting on city websites of vital public health conditions.

RESPONSE: The recommendation requires further analysis. The District issues threat warnings and notices to all public agencies, cities, and the County; these are posted on the District website. The District does not have the authority or ability to post directly on any agency website.

R6. OCVCD should engage the services of a public relations firm to develop ways to make the name and services more recognizable to the general public.

RESPONSE: The recommendation has not been implemented but will be implemented in the next budget year. The District has met with and is exploring the cost and benefit of engaging the services of a public relations firm.

Sincerely,



James Gomez
President, Board of Trustees
Orange County Vector Control District

JG/MGH/vb