

# Disaster Preparedness: Is Orange County Ready?

## 1. SUMMARY

A recent Los Angeles Times article headlined *Region may not be ready for Big One* questioned the capabilities of the governmental agencies that the public relies on for guidance and help during disasters, such as the speculative monster earthquake in the headline. A recent survey by the University of Southern California Norman Lear Center (a non-partisan research and public policy center) found that even those who have received earthquake education are not as prepared as they should be.

But in Orange County, if the training and dedication of those who staff the various Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) are any indication, then the answer to the headline's question would be positive.

It isn't just wall-splitting earthquakes. As in all of Southern California, there also are the regular visitations of floods, wildfires, "devil winds," mud slides and even the occasional tsunami to contend with.

In evaluating local disaster readiness, some of the findings of the 2009-2010 Orange County Grand Jury were:

- The city and county employees and volunteers of the Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) are prepared to cope with the consequences of natural and man-made disasters throughout Orange County.
- But individually, Orange County residents must become more aware of the calamities that may befall them and must be proactive in preparing for them.

## 2. REASON FOR STUDY

Taking heed of the recent worldwide spate of disasters, the 2009-2010 Orange County Grand Jury deemed it appropriate to study the organizations

### Abbreviations

CALEMA	California Emergency Management Agency
DES	Director of Emergency Service
EMB	Emergency Management Bureau
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
ICS	Incident Command System
JWA	John Wayne Airport
OA	Operational Area
OCEMO	Orange County Emergency Management Organization
OCSD	Orange County Sheriff's Department
OCWD	Orange County Water District
SEMS	Standardized Emergency Management System
USCG	United States Coast Guard

responsible for responding to calamities and their readiness. Recent local events such as wildfires and mud slides as well as numerous earthquakes felt in Orange County emphasize the need to be prepared.

## 3. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The Orange County Grand Jury visited several Emergency Operations Centers. These included the county's main Emergency Management Bureau (Loma Ridge); the EOCs of Mission Viejo, Westminster, Anaheim, Santa Ana, Costa Mesa, San Clemente, John Wayne Airport, Orange County Fire Authority and the Orange County Water District.

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*Mission Viejo's EOC features a large screen on which emergency personnel can view scenes from throughout their city.*

Interviews were conducted with senior staff, daily operations observed and reviewed. In addition, official documents were scrutinized.

## 4. BACKGROUND AND FACTS

Orange County residents are blessed with great weather, wonderful events and fine communities. But because it's an area at risk for earthquakes, wildfires and other natural disasters, preparing for the next calamity is imperative.

In California, the organization of emergency/disaster resources begins with the California Emergency Management Agency (CALEMA). Next in the hierarchy is the state's Regional CALEMA at the Los Alamitos Reserve facility, then the Orange County Sheriff's Department/Emergency Management Bureau and finally, Emergency Operations Centers in cities and districts.

The mission of the Emergency Management Bureau (EMB) is to promote, facilitate, and support County of Orange's efforts to prepare for, mitigate against, respond to and recover from disasters within the "operational area" (OA). State law makes each county a separate operational area. The established system in Orange County works because of a com-

prehensive communication system, executive level oversight, and extensive mutual aid agreements.

The scope of the network that must cope with disasters is much broader than an organizational chart would show. Under state law, all public employees (state, county, city, special districts) and school district employees are "disaster service workers subject to such disaster activities as may be assigned to them by their superiors or by law."

In Orange County, the Sheriff/Coroner is designated as the Director of Emergency Services (DES) for emergencies in which evacuation, law and order are the highest priority. The Fire Services Director is designated as the DES for emergencies where the life or safety of the public is threatened due to fire, mass casualty incidents or the release of hazardous materials.

The Emergency Management Bureau at Loma Ridge in Santiago Canyon frequently updates its plans, offers training monthly to all county members, supervises the emergency communications net that links local EOCs, controls AlertOC (the local "reverse 911" system) in unincorporated areas, and conducts disaster readiness exercises. The purpose of the exercises is to regularly test and update plans for incident management, public information and care-and-shelter operations.

The Emergency Management Bureau (EMB) is responsible for the 24-hour administration of the county-wide operational area and CALEMA contact as well as disaster planning involving the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. The EMB's purview includes writing and revising emergency plans, ensuring that the County Emergency Operation Center is in a constant state of readiness, applying for grants, exercises and drills, activating systems and procedures. The EMB also is responsible for training and for the Orange County Emergency Management Organization (OCEMO), where EOC managers meet monthly to share ideas and receive updates on current events.

These are some of the disaster readiness drills that the County EMB provides:

- Annual operational area exercises.

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- John Wayne Airport – 2005, 2008, 2010.
- Communications – 2006, 2007.
- Earthquake – 2004, 2007, 2008.
- Medical/Pandemic – Annually.
- Terrorism – 2002, 2004 (twice), 2005, 2007 (four times).
- Tsunami – 2006 (twice).
- San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station – Annually.
- Volunteer mutual aid drill – 2007.
- Statewide disaster readiness exercise – 2008, 2010.
- Golden Guardian Flood Exercise – 2010.

Some Orange County agencies such as John Wayne Airport (JWA), the Orange County Water District and the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station have programs similar to Loma Ridge's. For example, JWA's Emergency Operation Plan consists of these incident-specific plans:

- On-airport aircraft incident.
- Off-airport aircraft incident.
- Earthquake.
- Terminal evacuation.
- Civil disturbance.
- Bomb incident.
- Sabotage/hijacking.
- Structure fire.
- Flooding.
- Hazardous materials.

Every three years, JWA conducts a full-scale mass casualty exercise mandated by the Federal Aviation Administration, and "tabletop" simulations in the "off years." For the exercises, JWA partners with the FAA, FBI, Transportation Security Administration, American Red Cross, airport tenants, airlines that use the airport and the Coast Guard.

The federal government requires public agencies to continually train key staff on the incident command system (ICS) guidelines for handling emergencies. ICS is a standardized, on-scene, all hazard incident management protocol. The Orange County

Water District periodically conducts training sessions (funded by the Environmental Protection Agency) covering water sector incidents such as the ocean outfall emergency activation that closed beaches; the Yorba Linda Freeway Complex Fire; earthquakes, and oil spills.

Some of the other Orange County emergencies were the following:

- Storm/San Juan Creek – January 11, 2005.
- Storm/Prado Dam – January 14, 2005.
- Laguna Beach Landslide – June 1, 2005.
- 9-1-1 Communications Failure – October 18, 2005.
- Sierra Fire – February 6, 2006.
- Windy Ridge Fire – March 2007.
- Diemer Filtration Plant Shutdown – March 2007.
- Santiago Fire – October 2007.
- Winter Storms/Debris Flow – November 2007, 2008.
- Freeway Complex Fire – November 2008.
- Winter Storms/Debris Flow – 2010.



*Emergency electrical power generator available to power an EOC during electrical outages.*

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During the Grand Jury's visits to EOCs in several of the county's cities, several minor deficiencies were noticed. For example, Westminster's EOC is located in the A/B room of the Community Services Building and it takes approximately two hours to set up for an emergency incident. A new police building is under construction and upon completion, the EOC will relocate to that location. This new location will provide everything a modern EOC requires: emergency backup power, central storage for emergency supplies, on-site staffing, and the latest in communications capabilities. The city does not include staff in its quarterly "tabletop" exercises.

Costa Mesa's immediate backup EOC is located either in the Police Department Communications room or at Fire Station #5, both located in the same area as the primary EOC. If the primary EOC should be damaged due to earthquake or fire, this could also affect the backup EOC at either location.

In an emergency, the City of Santa Ana will use firefighters from Station #3 to assist in setting up the EOC on the second deck of the Public Works Administration Building. Backup EOC locations include the Police Headquarters, Red Cross Building, tents and a mobile command center.

The San Clemente EOC is set up from scratch in a multi-use conference room in the Utilities Administration building. That location was chosen because the structure was constructed to state required earthquake specifications and supported by the Utilities Yard emergency generator. All the requisite equipment to support a disaster response is stored in a secure closet and readily transportable.

Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) has an EOC that complies with the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), and mobile EOC outfitted with all the equipment, communications, and resources of its primary EOC, sufficient to support emergency functions should any incident occur. CUSD has an extensive data base, virtual mapping and photographs of each school in the district, and has individual job descriptions for each position.

California has tried to raise public awareness of earthquake dangers by holding an annual drill called

the Great California Shake Out (first conducted in 2008). But emergency services officials say they are worried that residents have lost the sense of urgency, particularly as people change residences, forget to refresh supplies and assume local, state and federal government agencies will provide for them.

All Orange County residents should take an active role to protect each other, families and friends in the event of an emergency ([www.readyoc.org](http://www.readyoc.org)). Think of the national emergency management system as a pyramid with householders forming the base of the structure. The local community, state and the federal government also are part of the pyramid.

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) is composed of neighbors working as volunteers



*Anaheim's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) stores equipment in this trailer, parked at the city's Emergency Operations Center. CERT volunteers are trained to assist during emergencies.*

trained to assist during emergencies. After certification, members attend monthly meetings and are involved in training exercises. Local agencies have training schedule information.

After a disaster, residents will need to provide their own food, water and other supplies for at least three days. Local officials and relief workers on the scene after a disaster cannot reach everyone immediately. Help may take hours or days to arrive. Basic services such as electricity, gas, water, sewage treatment, and telephones may be cut off for days, a

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week or longer. Also, residents may have to evacuate at a moment's notice, taking essential belongings.

The Orange County Red Cross recommends every home should plan how to deal with all kinds of disasters. Part of a disaster plan is to have two emergency kits: one for the home and one for the car. The home kit should be stored in an easily accessible location and placed into a mobile, watertight container such as a wheeled trash barrel. The car kit should be in an easily carried pack, such as a backpack, and each kit should have an identification tag for each person.

The Red Cross suggests the following items for both the home and car kits:

- First aid kit and essential medications.
- Canned food and can opener.
- At least three gallons of water per person.
- Protective clothing, rainwear and bedding or sleeping bags.
- Battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries.
- Special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.
- Written instructions for how to turn off gas, electricity and water if necessary.
- Keep essentials, such as a flashlight and sturdy shoes, by your bedside.

To view the complete list and to learn more about how to prepare for any potential disaster, visit the Red Cross website at [www.oc-redcross.org](http://www.oc-redcross.org).

Other disaster planning tips include registering for Alert OC, the mass notification system designed to keep Orange County residents and businesses informed of emergencies. Also, information about the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program can be obtained at each city hall.

## 5. FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, each finding will be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. The responses are to be submitted to the

Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. The 2009-2010 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at the following findings:

- F.1 Orange County is well prepared for emergency response to possible disasters.
- F.2 Westminster does not include field staff and supervisory staff in its quarterly "tabletop" exercises.
- F.3 Costa Mesa's backup EOC is located either in the Police Department Communications Room or at Fire Station #5, both in the same area as the primary EOC.
- F.4 Santa Ana, in an emergency, will use fire-fighters from Station #3 to assist in setting up the EOC.
- F.5 San Clemente uses effective procedures to alert, notify and mobilize the EOC staff in a timely manner, using telephones, pagers, cellular phones and text messaging.
- F.6 Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD), through donations and grants, has built an impressive, sophisticated EOC. CUSD has a mobile command vehicle ready with resources to support school relocation or any other emergency in its jurisdiction.

***Responses to Finding F.2 are required from the Mayor, City of Westminster. Responses to Finding F.3 are required from the Mayor, City of Costa Mesa. Responses to Finding F.4 are required from the Mayor, City of Santa Ana.***

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, each recommendation will be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based on the findings, the 2009-2010 Orange County Grand Jury makes the following recommendations:

- R.1 Orange County lead agencies should continue to pursue state and federal grants that enhance disaster preparedness and continue

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to conduct Shake Out exercises to facilitate a quick earthquake recovery.

- R.2 Westminster should include representatives from supervision and appropriate field operations in quarterly “tabletop” exercises; CERT volunteers should help to set up the EOC during activation and be included in “tabletop” exercises.
- R.3 Costa Mesa should find a backup EOC location that is not within the Civic Center complex.
- R.4 Santa Ana should recruit and train CERT volunteers and staff located in the Public Works Administration Building to help set up the EOC during activation. Firefighters from station #3 should be utilized to evaluate emergency needs throughout the city.
- R.5 Although the time taken to set up San Clemente’s EOC to make it operational has been deemed adequate, the city should consider adding wiring and permanent displays to the EOC facility to reduce setup time.
- R.6 Orange County and its municipalities should continue to make public safety and disaster preparedness the number one priority. Public education should be stressed through [www.readyoc.org](http://www.readyoc.org) and emergency management expos.

*Responses to Recommendation R.2 are required from the Mayor, City of Westminster. Responses to Recommendation R.3 are required from the Mayor, City of Costa Mesa. Responses to Recommendation R.4 are required from the Mayor, City of Santa Ana. Responses to Recommendation R.5 are required from the Mayor, City of San Clemente.*

## 7. REQUIRED RESPONSES

The California Penal Code specifies the required permissible responses to the findings and recommendations contained in this report. The specific sections are quoted below:

§933.05

(a) For purposes of Subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

- (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
- (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefore.

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

- (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
- (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.
- (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
- (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefore.

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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City of Mission Viejo – Paul Catsimanes, Public Service Administrative Manager.

City of Santa Ana – Captain Steve Snyder, Emergency Management.

City of San Clemente – Jen Tucker, Emergency Planning Officer.

City of Westminster – Rebecca Barlow, Emergency Preparedness.

Orange County Fire Authority – Battalion Chief Mike Fertig, Emergency Planning.

John Wayne Airport – Allen Murphy, Airport Director; Jim Ellis, Administrative Manager, Emergency Preparedness

Emergency Management Bureau (Loma Ridge) – Donna Boston, Emergency Manager.

Orange County Water District – Kelly Hubbard, Emergency Response Organization.

San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station – Debbie Knight, Corporate Communications Southern California Edison

those who live or work in Orange County informed of important information during emergency events and has the capability of quickly sending time-sensitive emergency voice messages from public safety officials to your home, cell or business phone.

**WebEOC** – A web-based (Extranet) program being hosted by the Operational Area EOC with redundant systems at Anaheim, Santa Ana, Irvine and Huntington Beach, available to all cities and the State, enables communication between jurisdictions. Includes displaying of significant events, resource tracking, and latest situation status and activity logs. Provides a list of all employee contacts for the city, CERT volunteers and allows members to monitor from home.

**CERT** – Community Emergency Response Team: Program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace when professional responders are not immediately available to help. CERT members also are encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their community.

**“Tabletop” Exercise** – A group discussion based on a simulated disaster. Emphasis is placed upon a low-stress, yet thorough, group problem-solving process.

**Phone Books** – Additional information, including locations of public transportation assembly points, evacuation routes, first aid and survival tips may be found in the Customer Guide section in municipalities adjacent to SONGS.

## 9. APPENDIX

### Web sites:

[www.readyoc.org](http://www.readyoc.org) The Ready OC campaign of the county’s Emergency Management Bureau is an educational program informing residents and businesses about the importance of preparing for any kind of natural or man-made disaster. Working together, everyone can make a difference in creating awareness, motivating preparedness and encouraging involvement. Ready.gov has a list of appropriate food for your home emergency kit.

[www.alertoc.com](http://www.alertoc.com) – is Orange County’s regional public mass notification system designed to keep

