

ACCESS CONCERNS AT THE ORANGE COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

SUMMARY

The County of Orange maintains and operates an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at Loma Ridge. It is important that it be prepared and in a state of readiness at all times. The EOC is set up and ready 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, and it appears that adequate emergency supplies are available for use by the response team. It is important that the facility be accessible to the team of officials and support personnel who assemble at the EOC in emergency situations. The primary access road is narrow, winding, and has two blind curves. The secondary road provides very limited access. There is an alternate EOC on Eckhoff Street in Orange that could accommodate about one-third of the approximately 150-person response team that would assemble in major emergencies. It has limited equipment, does not have emergency generators in the event there is a power failure, and does not contain sufficient supplies for fourteen days of operation. For these and other reasons, it does not meet the criteria stated in Annex A, pages 44 and 45 of the 1997 *County of Orange Emergency Plan* (the Plan). (See Appendix B)

The *County of Orange Emergency Plan* should include assembly procedures for transporting team members to the Loma Ridge facility under both normal and abnormal circumstances, but there are no such procedures in the Plan to date. The Plan should be reviewed, and it should be revised where and when appropriate. In fact, there have been no revisions of the plan since its inception on August 1, 1997.

All of the above matters will be addressed in this report and recommendations will be made to the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the emergency access capability of the Emergency Operations Center of the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department located at Loma Ridge. The Grand Jury is concerned with the state of both the primary and secondary access roads to the facility. There is concern also about the suitability of the alternate EOC and about the

procedures for assembly to the facility. In this report the Grand Jury will make recommendations to address all of those concerns.

METHOD OF STUDY

The Grand Jury visited the Emergency Operations Center at Loma Ridge on several occasions to inspect the facility and the roads leading to it. We examined drawings of the primary access road. Interviews were held with representatives of the Emergency Operations Center in order to obtain information. The *County of Orange Emergency Plan* was reviewed with respect to staffing and instructions for mobilizing the emergency organization. Members of the Grand Jury visited the alternate Emergency Operations Center located in the City of Orange and interviewed members of the Emergency Operations Center at that site. Interviews were held with representatives of the Public Facilities and Resources Department and the Transportation Corridor Agencies. *The Offer of Dedication, Title Report and Guarantee* with respect to land acquisition for the present site also were reviewed. Grand Jury members reviewed the report of the 1998–1999 Grand Jury titled *Safety Concerns at The Orange County Emergency Operations Center*.

BACKGROUND

The County of Orange maintains and operates the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at Loma Ridge. The center has complete communications capability, a two-week supply of food, 30,000 gallons of water, and 16,000 gallons of fuel. There are emergency generators to supply electricity should there be a power failure.

Some disasters are potentially of such magnitude as to make centralized command and control essential. In such instances, the staff of the EOC would immediately begin the task of alerting the team consisting of top county officials and support people, who then would assemble at the EOC as rapidly as possible. The team would take over direction of essential emergency response tasks. The number of people responding to the emergency situation could be as many as 150.

This report will focus on four areas:

- The condition of access roads and bridges.
- Establishment of a new alternate EOC.
- Development of backup procedures to establish routing to the EOC, to the alternate EOC, and to designated pick up-points.
- Development of review procedures making the 1997 *County of Orange Emergency Plan* a living and up-to-date document at all times.

HOW TO GET THERE

To reach the EOC, one exits from Santiago Canyon Road to an unmarked road, then proceeds across a bridge, which spans the 241 Tollway. One then continues up to the Loma Ridge facility along a narrow winding road, which has blind curves. This primary access road is approximately 1.3 miles long, and has two electronic gates, one near the bottom, and one near the top of the road. Approximately 1/10 mile of the road at the bottom and 4/10 miles at the facility end of the road are 24 feet wide. The balance of the road is single lane and approximately 15 feet wide. Inclement weather, grazing cattle, and deer crossing the road add to the difficulty of its use, especially at night.

ALTERNATE METHODS

There is a secondary access road. It begins at the EOC end of the bridge and goes in an easterly direction toward the southbound side to the 241 Tollway. The road is less than one-quarter mile in length, and is barely wide enough for one-way traffic. There is a locked gate at the top. It was intended that this road be a means of access to Loma Ridge if the bridge across the tollway were to be impassable. As the road approaches the tollway, it makes an abrupt ninety-degree left turn, and completely ends about twenty feet from the tollway. There are deep wheel tracks left by large vehicles that indicate that the vehicles do not turn left, but continue straight ahead off-road in an easterly direction parallel to the tollway. About one-half mile southeast of the bridge, there is a discontinuity in the K-rail. (K-rail is a prefabricated section used to construct barriers in highway medians.) At the juncture of two sections, the ends have been offset to allow emergency vehicles to cross from one side of the tollway to the other.

It is possible that off-road vehicles could make their way to the EOC at Loma Ridge by using the secondary road. If the access bridge were impassable, or if bridges were down at the intersection of the 241 and 261 Tollways, the approach would have to be from the southeast. That means that vehicles would have to cross over from the northbound side of the tollway at the discontinuity, and continue traveling in the same direction on the wrong side of the tollway for about one-half mile. (If a bridge were down, the tollway would be closed to all but emergency vehicles.) At the point where the secondary access road comes closest to the tollway, the vehicles would then turn onto it, and proceed to the EOC.

The use of the secondary access road by individual response team members for assembly to the EOC in an emergency would be impractical. Rather, the team members would have to report to a pick-up point and be brought into the facility by experienced personnel driving off-road vehicles. The secondary road appears to be of very limited value. Consideration should be given to establishing a road to the facility at Loma Ridge from the 261 Tollway.

ARRIVAL BY HELICOPTER

If various sections of the County were to become isolated because highways and bridges were made impassable by earthquake, fire, or other disasters, arrival at the EOC by helicopter would be the only alternative. It is even possible that the Loma Ridge facility could be

isolated from the rest of the County. The Orange County Sheriff's Department (OCSD) has two helicopters; one of which is operational at all times. They are six-seat helicopters, and can carry a two-man crew and four passengers. A round trip from some pick-up points to the EOC at Loma Ridge could take as long as twenty minutes, depending on the location of the pick-up point. It would take about two hours to assemble a team of about 20 top officials under those conditions. Beyond that, in most disaster situations, it would be impractical, and consume too much time to transport the remaining 130 persons in the support group taken two at a time.

The Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) has three helicopters, two of which are operational at all times. They are nine-man helicopters and could deliver the 20 person command team to the EOC in approximately one hour. It is obvious that it would take an additional five to six hours to transport the remainder of the 130 people needed to support the top officials in directing response to emergencies caused by the disaster. An agreement could be negotiated and procedures developed by the OCSD and the OCFA for the use of OCFA helicopters to transport top county officials and support team members in an emergency. It is recognized however, that in some emergency situations (for example large brush fires) the OCFA would have other priorities.

Consideration should be given to negotiating agreements with the state of California and the federal government to supply helicopter assistance from Los Alamitos and/or Camp Pendleton should there be a high-level emergency. Any agreement should provide for immediate assistance without having to wait for a declaration of state or federal emergency.

The Grand Jury recognizes that under certain weather conditions, helicopters cannot fly. Therefore, it is important that the primary access road be safe and reliable, and that an adequate secondary road be established.

THE ALTERNATE EOC

An alternate Emergency Operations Center has been established at 840 North Eckhoff Street in the City of Orange. It is to be used in the event the primary EOC is inaccessible, damaged, or for safety reasons, uninhabitable. The facility does not meet the criteria stated in Annex A, page 44, 45 - VII of the *County of Orange Emergency Plan*. It is only large enough to accommodate about 45 of the 150 people needed for a level-three emergency (a high level emergency requiring full activation of the response team). There are no emergency generators. There is a limited amount of communications equipment. The facility is not set up on a 24 hour per day, seven days per week basis, and it would take several hours to prepare it for emergency service. There are insufficient food, water and other supplies. The contents and furnishings of the facility would not withstand the tremors of a major earthquake and the resultant damage could make the alternate EOC inoperable.

COUNTY OF ORANGE EMERGENCY PLAN

The *County of Orange Emergency Plan* addresses the County's response to natural disasters and other incidents. It is a basic training and reference document for emergency

preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. The Emergency Operations Center at Loma Ridge is a vital part of those activities. The Plan is both detailed and comprehensive with respect to who is to report and when they should report in emergency situations. However, there are no procedures detailing how to report in unusual conditions. If the primary access road is impassable, backup routing should be specified. If some sections of the County are isolated due to circumstances caused by the disaster, members of the reporting team should be routed to a predetermined pick-up site in the affected area. It would be desirable to have two levels of backup to the Plan.

The Plan was disseminated August 1, 1997. It was intended to be revised, upgraded, improved, and tested on a continuing basis to ensure that it not become “just another plan on the shelf.” (Please see Exhibit A for the text of then Supervisor Steiner’s Letter of Promulgation dated September 24, 1996.)

There have been no revisions or additions to the plan to date.

FINDINGS

Under *California Penal Code*, Sections 933 and 933.05, responses are required to all findings. A response to all findings in this report is required from the **Sheriff-Coroner**.

1. The primary access road is a winding narrow road with blind curves. The road is a maximum of 15 feet wide over most of the 1.3 mile distance.
2. The secondary access road to the Emergency Operations Center is almost unusable in its present condition and location. It is not satisfactory for use as a backup to the primary access road.
3. Some areas of the County could become completely isolated due to the nature of certain emergencies. In that event, transporting emergency team members to the Emergency Operations Center from designated pick-up stations by helicopter would be the most effective, and perhaps the only feasible method.
4. There are no agreements or procedures with other agencies, the State of California or the federal government for emergency helicopter transport to the Emergency Operations Center.
5. The existing alternate EOC does not meet the criteria for a facility of that type as stated in Annex A, page 44, VII of the *County of Orange Emergency Plan*.
6. The *County of Orange Emergency Plan* has not been reviewed on a continuing basis nor have revisions or additions been incorporated in the plan since its inception on August 1, 1997.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with *California Penal Code*, Sections 933 and 933.05, each recommendation must be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. These responses are submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. The **Sheriff-Coroner** is required to respond to all of the recommendations below. Based on the above findings, the 1999-2000 Grand Jury recommends that the **Sheriff-Coroner**:

1. Widen the primary access road to the Emergency Operations Center to 24 feet and eliminate blind curves.
2. Upgrade the secondary access road to the Emergency Operations Center or otherwise provide a viable alternative to the primary access road.
3. Divide the County into several areas or zones and, by agreement with local authorities, establish helicopter pick-up sites.
4. Develop agreements and procedures with other agencies, the state of California and the federal government for the use of helicopters in an emergency. The helicopters would be utilized to transport top County officials and support-members of the team to the Emergency Operations Center.
5. Establish an alternate EOC that meets the criteria stated in Annex A, page 44, VII of the *County of Orange Emergency Plan*.
6. Establish procedures to facilitate continuous review of the *County of Orange Emergency Plan* so that revisions and additions will be made on a timely basis.

APPENDIX A

*County of Orange
Emergency Plan*

PREFACE

LETTER OF PROMULGATION

September 24, 1996

Members of the Board of Supervisors
County Department Heads,
American Red Cross/Orange County Chapter, Cities,
State Office of Emergency Services
Other Participants in the County of Orange Response and Recovery Organization

Dear Emergency Response and Recovery Officials;

On behalf of the Emergency Management Council of the County of Orange, I wish to announce the completion of the 1996 County of Orange Emergency Plan. The Board of Supervisors has adopted this plan in concept on the recommendation of the Emergency Management Council. This plan includes for the first time the Standardized Emergency Management System, the Incident Command System, the duties of the County as Operational Area Lead Agency, and both response and recovery operations. It is a companion document to the 1996 Orange County Operational Area Emergency Plan. A copy of the document may be obtained through the Emergency Management Council Subcommittee and the Orange County Emergency Management Organization.

While this plan has been over nine months in the making, it is also a compilation of expertise and experience gained over many years by the dedicated County staff and other members of the County response and recovery organization. It is also complimented by the many other plans developed to meet specific emergencies, including the Hazardous Materials Response Plan and the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station Plan, and the myriad of maps, charts, procedures, checklists, directories and other resources contained in the County/Operational Area Emergency Operations Center.

Still, the plan remains a 'draft,' a starting point, a guideline and an academic and theoretical document. Continued revision, upgrade, improvement, development of operating procedures and testing of the plan are necessary to ensure that it does not become 'just another plan on the shelf'. We look to you as members of the County of Orange Emergency Organization to assist in what is really an ongoing process, to provide input and revisions, to participate in the exercises and drills to test the plan, and of course to respond along side us in actual events, and make changes and improvements as we learn from our continually increasing expertise and experience.

Sincerely,

William Steiner, Chair, Emergency Management Council
County of Orange

APPENDIX B

VII. ALTERNATE EOC

An alternate EOC should be established in the event the primary EOC be inaccessible, damaged, or for safety reasons uninhabitable. The purpose of the alternate EOC is to gather and disseminate information should the EOC staff have to relocate to that location.

- A. The alternate EOC should be chosen to meet as many of the same requirements as the primary EOC as possible.
 - 1. Located as near as possible to the buildings housing the primary offices of government;
 - 2. Located outside of known hazard areas (nuclear target areas, flood plains, dam circulation zones, facilities with hazardous materials, earthquake fault lines, nuclear power plants, airport flight paths, etc.);
 - 3. Protected access control, communications, support systems, etc.;
 - 4. Constructed to withstand severe weather, earthquakes, hazardous materials releases (if possible), and has a fallout protection factor of 100 or greater;
 - 5. Contains sufficient food, water, medical, bedding, and sanitation and welfare stocks for at least 14 days or operation;
 - 6. Contains emergency power supply for at least 14 days or operation;
 - 7. Contains radiological monitoring equipment;
 - 8. Contains communications equipment to communicate with the next level of government and the public; and
 - 9. Contains adequate space to accommodate key government officials, agency chiefs, department heads, and support staff required to carry out essential emergency services.
- B. In addition to the criteria for a primary EOC, the objectives to be considered when designating an alternate EOC are listed below:
 - 1. Determining and ensuring the operational capabilities of the alternate EOC;
 - 2. Making provisions for notifying staff, Operational Area members, the State, etc. of the use of an alternate EOC; and
 - 3. Making provisions for relocating direction and control authority and staff members to the alternate EOC.