

Other Committee Activities

Observations

Members of the Grand Jury conducted protocol visits with a number of key Ventura County law, justice and public safety representatives. These included the Juvenile Justice Presiding Judge, County Counsel, District Attorney, Public Defender, Medical Examiner/Coroner and senior levels of the County's fire and law enforcement agencies.

The Juvenile Justice and Adult Detention Facilities protocol visits are covered in separate Grand Jury reports. County Counsel, District Attorney and Public Defender protocol visits also were made.

Protocol visits to a wide range of law enforcement agencies, facilities and functions are described in the following overview categories. The County Fire Protection District protocol visits were conducted to assess maintenance, training, status of emergency response capability and limitations, mutual aid and mass casualty incidents.

Executive Management and Senior Staff Level Personnel

The executive management levels interviewed included the Sheriff, Fire Chief, city police chiefs and the California Highway Patrol operating in Ventura County. All these key individuals left the Grand Jury members with a perspective that the public safety management in Ventura County is in the hands of dedicated, intelligent and involved professionals.

Line Personnel

Members of the Grand Jury met with and interviewed several representative "line" level fire and law enforcement personnel. Line personnel that were observed by members of the Grand Jury appeared well-trained, well-equipped, enthusiastic and dedicated. Without exception they were all candid, knowledgeable and public-service focused.

In Ventura County mandated service to the public is on-going and well-served. There appears to be a successful law enforcement deterrence which serves the public with increasing safety and security. Measurable results have been achieved in protecting the public. This year in its annual announcement, the Federal Bureau of Investi-

gation named two cities in Ventura County as being the top two safest cities in the nation. In Ventura County major crimes do exist and major criminal elements do exist and operate; however they do not generally operate openly or where and how they might chose.

Ventura County Law Enforcement and Fire Fighter Academies

Ventura County has the good fortune of having exceptional law enforcement and fire protection training academies. Both are among the highest rated training academies in the State. Each law enforcement agency in Ventura County presented processes they follow that allow them to select who they determine as the most suitable personnel to train for serving in the capacity as law enforcement officers. These are the candidates that are admitted to the academy. The candidates for the Fire Fighter training academy have a different and equally successful selection process.

Ventura County Emergency Operations Center

Ventura County's EOC is located below ground in the Hall of Corrections. While it could likely survive a regional nuclear strike, it appears vulnerable to a much more likely threat: an earthquake. The personnel responsible for non-emergency maintenance of the center are knowledgeable and very involved in emergency management activities. They provide an exceptional cadre for training essential emergency management personnel.

Patrol of Unincorporated Areas

The Department was unable to accommodate the Grand Jury's request for ride-alongs in unincorporated areas of the County. The presence of public safety activities in these areas, therefore, could not be verified by this Grand Jury.

Sheriff's Equestrian Unit

Training of the Sheriff's "mounted" unit was observed and included participation by a Grand Jury member with equestrian experience. The curriculum was well-planned. A wide range of both experienced and potential situations that a mounted rider might face in a deployment was presented to each horse and rider. Professional coaching on riding technique and individual horse and rider evaluations provide the County with an exceptionally qualified and capable mounted unit. A Sheriff's Captain is the officer in charge of the mounted unit. Sergeants and a number of Senior Deputies round out the leadership cadre.

Public Safety Summary

Ventura County public safety appears to be led and represented by dedicated, experienced and operations-knowledgeable individuals. The concept of orchestration of resources to meet both the current and near-future requirements of public safety and sustaining essential public

safety resources in the areas of procurement and maintenance appeared to be well understood although not always practiced.

Ventura County Fire Protection District

The Committee conducted a protocol visit to the Ventura County Fire Protection District Headquarters at the Camarillo Airport. The purpose of this visit was to inquire about the capability and status of Ventura County's fire protection resource management infrastructure, mutual aid infrastructure, application of the State's mandatory Standard Emergency Management System (SEMS) and hazardous material (HAZMAT) training and readiness levels. Grand Jury HAZMAT concerns included chemical, biological and natural disaster mass casualty incidents. Members of the Grand Jury sought details regarding training, equipment, response capacity, mutual aid and emergency communications (911).

Ventura County's Fire Chief and his primary staff were well informed and provided an overview that this county, like many other counties, lacks funding to meet and sustain a viable major HAZMAT reaction capability.

Should a major HAZMAT incident occur, it appears that this county can hope for limited support in a recovery phase afterwards. It will not be within the capability of first responders to enter into any major HAZMAT area to retrieve victims.

At the Fire Protection District Headquarters, the Fire Chief received the members of the committee and provided a comprehensive and candid overview specifically addressing each of the Grand Jury's points of interest.

Grand Jury members were also shown the District's communications operations and the maintenance facilities.

A point of interest for the Grand Jury and a direct benefit to the citizens of Ventura County is that the Fire Protection District, as of this year (1999), now coordinates all fire resources for emergency dispatch. This practice directly causes the dispatch of the closest and most appropriate fire fighting or rescue resource for the stated emergency, no matter what jurisdiction the fire fighting or rescue resource belongs to.

Fire Protection District Communications Operation

Currently the District receives its calls for emergency response directly from the Sheriff's Department 911 Communications Center. During a major state of emergency there is a recognized potential that a system overload could prevent fire resources from being dispatched effectively. Modernization and construction efforts are in process which will enhance the communications capability of the Fire Protection District.

Maintenance Facility

While currently located at the Camarillo Airport across the street from the Animal Shelter, the Fire Protection District maintenance facility will be moving by the end of 1999 to a location on the campus of the California State University, Channel Islands.

The District has the highest standard and number of certified maintenance personnel in the County. To work on emergency fire vehicles and equipment an individual is required to have specialized training and certifications for each type of fire-fighting equipment. A general mechanic is not authorized to perform any maintenance on the often highly specialized vehicles and equipment. The professional capabilities of District maintenance personnel are so well recognized that other departments utilize them rather than factory technicians. They are well organized and equipped to provide both time and cost savings.