

Emergency Preparedness Plans

Summary

The Grand Jury received comprehensive emergency preparedness reports from all ten Ventura County cities and conducted detailed “After the Fire” debriefings with the four cities impacted by the late October-November 2003 Fire emergency: Moorpark, Santa Paula, Simi Valley and Fillmore. A review of the reports and the debriefings confirms the cities are prepared to address potential disasters that could threaten them.

Background

The investigation was initiated through the Grand Jury oversight function involving a bid request from the City of Port Hueneme concerning the use of a consulting firm to update its emergency preparedness plan. The Grand Jury requested, received and reviewed emergency plans from all ten Ventura County cities.

The Grand Jury was interested in the level of preparedness of each city and, therefore, felt it was appropriate to request the latest emergency plan document. The event of September 11, 2001, was also an important factor in this investigation to ensure the cities were developing necessary procedures to protect their citizens.

Methodology

The Grand Jury reviewed all city emergency preparedness plans. The primary focus was to ascertain whether the cities had developed comprehensive plans, and which plans contained the necessary contingencies to address a potential major disaster within their jurisdictions. The Grand Jury was made aware during discussions with appropriate city staff members that the plans would not address day-to-day activities but would focus on the main perceived threats within the jurisdiction.

The Grand Jury requested that the cities provide the most current version of their emergency preparedness plans for review. Staff members of several cities emphasized that the plans were either being revised, or shortly would be revised, by either city staff or with the help of a consultant.

The Grand Jury considered the authors of the documents, their contents, and the written recommendations that addressed a potential disaster. The focus was on the level of detail in regard to the state requirements specified in the State of California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), guidelines developed through the State Office of Emergency Services.

The methodology was expanded to include an investigation into the adequacy of the emergency plans during the October-November 2003 fire that impacted the cities of Fillmore, Moorpark, Santa Paula, and Simi Valley. The Grand Jury attended a series of debriefings with city emergency services officials involved with the fire emergency. The debriefings focused on learning if the emergency preparedness plans were effective, and

if any unexpected revelations occurred which would cause the emergency plans to be revised to reflect developments during an actual emergency.

The Grand Jury also examined the level of mutual aid and cooperation between cities and the County of Ventura in the event of an emergency. This examination is necessary based on the SEMS guidelines that include the following discussion concerning the statewide mutual aid system:

"The foundation of California's emergency planning and response is a statewide mutual aid system which is designed to ensure that adequate resources, facilities, and other support is provided to jurisdictions whenever their own resources prove inadequate to cope with a given situation. The basis for the system is the California Disaster and Civil Defense Master Mutual Aid Agreement, as provided for in the California Emergency Services Act." (City of Simi Valley SEMS Multihazard Functional Plan, Part One, Section Four, March 2001)

The Grand Jury requested copies of the required "After Action Plans" that the cities produced in accordance with the regulations contained in the SEMS guidelines and the standardized questionnaire associated with this process. The Grand Jury was informed that the cities of Simi Valley and Moorpark will be preparing these plans within the SEMS required 90-day timeframe from the date of the disaster and would submit them when they are completed. The cities of Fillmore and Santa Paula were unable to submit their reports in time to be reviewed in conjunction with this report.

Findings

- F-01.** All ten cities within Ventura County submitted plans that reflect compliance with Title 19 of the California Code of Regulations. The plans include the requirements set forth in the Standardized Emergency Management System developed by the State Office of Emergency Services.
- F-02.** A specific consultant firm had developed the majority of the city plans. The exceptions identified were the cities of Ojai, Santa Paula and Simi Valley.
- F-03.** The plans used a standardized template developed by a coalition of 12 southern California cities. The template was later used by cities statewide.
- F-04.** The emergency plans do not address the day-to-day emergencies that might arise or the typical routine procedures that are executed daily to address potential or real problems.
- F-05.** All the plans include the same structure or contents and include the following primary sections:
- Management
 - Operations
 - Planning/Intelligence
 - Logistics
 - Finance /Administration
- F-06.** The potential threats listed in the ten Ventura County city plans are nearly identical in nature and include the following:

- Major Earthquake
 - Dam Failure
 - Hazardous Materials Incident
 - Flooding
 - Fires
 - Civil Unrest
 - Transportation Truck Incident
 - Transportation Train Derailment
 - Terrorism
- F-07.** The emergency plans provide for comprehensive checklists that specify the responsibilities of city officials in the event of an emergency.
- F-08.** The comments provided by city officials of Fillmore, Moorpark, Santa Paula and Simi Valley in the "After the Fire" debriefings suggest there will always be variables or events not anticipated concerning emergency situations and thus, the emergency plans and training exercises require periodic updates.
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Conclusions

- C-01.** The emergency preparedness plans generally provide the necessary structure to address potential disasters provided that the designated personnel utilize the checklist from the SEMS guidelines. (F-01, F-02, F-03, F-05, F-07)
- C-02.** The state mandated mutual aid system, which is so integral to providing an effective response during an emergency, appears to work effectively and should be utilized whenever possible to ensure a positive conclusion related to an emergency. (F-01)
- C-03.** The nature of an emergency response requires continuing refresher courses or ongoing training to address new potential threats, especially in the area of bio-terrorism. (F-08)
- C-04.** The cities should update their emergency preparedness plans with information provided through the "lessons learned" from each new emergency incident. (F-08)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The cities should schedule periodic updates or reviews of their respective emergency preparedness plans, to reflect the ongoing developments, such as technological breakthroughs, or threats, such as bio-terrorism.
- R-02.** The Ventura County Fire Protection District should schedule and conduct periodic joint briefings in conjunction with city fire and police departments within Ventura County to improve levels of communication and coordination that are necessary for mutual aid during an actual threat or emergency.

Responses

Recommendations	R-02
Responses Required From:	
Ventura County Fire Protection District	X