



VENTURA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

800 SOUTH VICTORIA AVENUE, VENTURA, CA 93009 PHONE (805) 654-2380

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ERIC DOWD
Assistant Sheriff

June 19, 2018

The Honorable Patricia M. Murphy
Presiding Judge, Ventura County Superior Court
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Subject: Grand Jury Report: 2017-2018 "Ventura County Dam Safety"

Dear Judge Murphy:

This letter is in response to the Grand Jury's Conclusions and Recommendations contained in the 2017-2018 Ventura County Dam Safety final report dated May 10, 2018.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion (C-01): The Grand Jury concluded that there are 14 dams, including four in Los Angeles County, that could cause significant loss of life and property damage in Ventura County if they failed. Of those, DSOD has identified four dams as having existing or potential deficiencies. (FA-01, FA-02, FA-03, FA-04)

Response: We agree with this conclusion.

Conclusion (C-06): The Grand Jury concluded that dam-disaster response plans reviewed follow state guidelines. However, they provide little or no guidance beyond the process of notifying dam management and the OES. (FA-04, FA-13)

Response: We disagree partially with this conclusion. Emergency Action Plans, written and maintained by dam operators, are organized with key components that follow state and federal guidelines. This includes emergency responsibilities, emergency notification processes, response processes, preparedness actions including surveillance and monitoring processes and inundation maps.

Conclusion (C-07): The Grand Jury concluded that with limited exceptions, there does not appear to be any way of notifying people in potential inundation areas of pending disasters other than the phone and cell-phone alert systems. These systems are likely to fail in a major earthquake. (FA-14, FA-15, FA-16, FA-17, FA-18)

Response: We disagree wholly with this conclusion. Emergency notifications and warnings are issued using a multimodal and redundant system. The system is comprised of numerous capabilities including VC Alert, the Emergency Alert System, Wireless Emergency Alert System, sirens, traditional media and social media. These tools broadcast notifications and warnings to landline phones, cellular phones, radio, television, weather radio, digital platforms like email, Nixle and Twitter. Additionally, public safety officials make notifications and warnings in-person and by using public address equipment on aircraft and vehicles.

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Conclusion (C-08): The Grand Jury concluded there does not appear to be any effort by the dam owners or the OES to educate the public as to potential inundation areas, evacuation routes, or what to do in the event of a dam failure. (FA-14, FA-15, FA-16, FA-17, FA-18)

Response: We disagree partially with this conclusion. The Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services (OES) provides all-hazard preparedness information to Ventura County communities and makes the information accessible via community meetings and the ReadyVenturaCounty website. This includes dam hazard preparedness information and dam inundation maps. Sheriff's OES is committed to promoting a culture of preparedness in Ventura County and will continue to work with dam stakeholders and community members to provide dam hazard preparedness information.

Conclusion (C-09): The Grand Jury concluded that the OES's main tools to notify the public in the event of a dam failure have been upgraded to include information in both English and Spanish. (FA-18, FA-19)

Response: We agree with this conclusion.

Conclusion (C-10): The Grand Jury concluded that while the DSOD requires inspections, there is no local monitoring or public awareness as to the status of the dams and the actions taken by their owners to improve their reliability and safety. (F-01, F-02, F-03, F-04, F-05, F-06)

Response: We disagree partially with this conclusion. The Sheriff's OES is not responsible for monitoring or regulating dam safety. The Sheriff's OES does partner with dam operators and stakeholders, including the California Department of Water Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD), to accomplish the mission of supporting and coordinating preparedness, mitigation, and response and recovery efforts for dam hazards. This includes exercises, workshops and planning efforts that are conducted on a routine basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation (R-01): The Grand Jury recommends that the OES track the progress of remedial action taken at Matilija Dam, Santa Felicia Dam, Castaic Dam, and Bouquet Canyon Dam. Reports of progress should be made to the BOS annually. (C-01, C-02, C-03, C-04, C-05)

Response: We disagree wholly with this recommendation. The Sheriff's OES is not responsible for monitoring or regulating dam safety. This is the responsibility of dam operators and state and federal regulatory agencies.

Recommendation (R-02): The Grand Jury recommends that the OES consider working with dam owners and cities to develop and widely distribute dam failure inundation maps and other information to assist residents in planning for responses to dam failures. (C-06, C-07, C-08)

Response: We agree with this recommendation. The Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services (OES) has a history of collaborating with dam operators and stakeholders including regulatory agencies and will continue this partnership in providing dam hazard preparedness information to Ventura County communities. Sheriff's OES remains committed to keeping the community informed of dam hazards and will provide preparedness information using all available modes of distribution including mail, community meetings, and the ReadyVenturaCounty website.

Recommendation (R-03): The Grand Jury recommends that the OES consider working with dam owners and cities to pursue placement of signage and sirens within the inundation areas. (C-07, C-08, C-09)

The Honorable Patricia Murphy
Presiding Judge, Ventura County Superior Court
June 19, 2018
Page 3

Response: This requires further analysis. The use of inundation maps and multimodal emergency notification and warning system currently exists and can effectively notify the impacted areas. Further analysis of a siren system and signage is needed to determine if they would increase notification and warning effectiveness.

Recommendation (R-04): The Grand Jury recommends that the OES work more closely with DSOD to monitor and evaluate safety for dams in or affecting Ventura County. (C-10)

Response: We disagree with this recommendation. Dam operators and the California Department of Water Resources Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD) have the responsibility and technical capability to monitor and evaluate dam safety. The Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services (OES) has a history of collaborating with dam operators and DSOD and will continue this partnership in providing support and coordination for dam hazard preparedness, mitigation, and response and recovery efforts.

Recommendation (R-05): The Grand Jury recommends the BOS direct the Public Works Department to provide technical assistance, as appropriate, to the OES, augmenting its expertise in dam safety and operation. (C-10)

Response: We agree partially with this recommendation. The Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services partners with the County of Ventura Public Works Agency (PWA) regarding all-hazards whole community emergency preparedness, response and recovery to include dam safety. In particular, PWA currently provides Sheriff's OES with Emergency Action Plans and inundation maps that are maintained by PWA. PWA and Sheriff's OES also serve in critical planning roles in dam safety preparedness and in supporting and coordinating emergencies when the County Emergency Operations Center is activated in response to an emergency.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this Grand Jury report. If additional explanation is needed, please feel free to contact Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services Assistant Director Kevin McGowan at (805) 654-2552 or kevin.mcgowan@ventura.org

Sincerely,


Geoff Dean
Sheriff