

Santa Barbara County 2021 CSAC Challenge Executive Summary

Santa Barbara County Concurrent Emergency Shelter Program

Overview:

The Concurrent Emergency Shelter Program developed procedures to provide community evacuation support in a safe manner in the event of an emergency during COVID-19.

Challenge:

The Santa Barbara County/Operational Area Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has been formally activated 18 times since the Thomas Fire in late 2017, cumulating into 622 days of EOC activation. Though the County is proficient at providing emergency care and shelter services, the high transmissibility and severe threat of the COVID-19 virus demanded that the County adapt and prepare for the next major incident with the assumption that such an incident could occur during the pandemic. At the same time, federal guidance, state mandates, local health officer orders, and agency-specific policies that influence how to provide emergency public services continuously changed. Despite the establishment early in the pandemic of non-congregate sheltering (NCS) as a best practice for evacuation support, few local hotels were willing to support NCS operations. Concern mounted regarding what to do with evacuated people at the onset of a significant concurrent emergency should NCS options be limited or not immediately available.

Solution:

The County Department of Social Services (CoDSS) and Office of Emergency Management (OEM) were tasked as the co-leads responsible for finding a solution. CoDSS and OEM established a multi-agency coordination group in order to seek solutions from a whole community perspective, which included representation from local cities, the American Red Cross (ARC), local law and fire agencies, and select County departments. The new “Concurrent Emergency Planning Team” then researched and assessed guidance, policies, and recommended best practices from all levels of government and the ARC to understand COVID-related restrictions and modifications to traditional care and shelter tactics. This included assessing the use of NCS, outreach to local hotels, understanding new congregate sheltering limitations, and a litany of other topics. The Temporary Evacuation Point (TEP) concept was then created. A TEP is an outdoor location that is a safe distance from the incident where evacuated persons could go to receive official incident updates, be pre-screened by the ARC for their services, and receive snacks and water while waiting in their vehicle or socially distancing outside. This allowed for the quick provision of emergency care and shelter services and supported ARC practices, all done within the confines of existing guidance. The Team then researched ideal locations countywide and developed a TEP Directory with the details of each pre-identified TEP site. The TEP Directory is updated routinely as a living document. Additionally, the Team conducted a field exercise

to test established policies, have continued to update concepts with the expectation that TEP sites will continue to be used, and is planning a second field exercise.

Innovation: The innovation of the Concurrent Emergency Planning Program cannot be overstated. Creativity is the backbone of the Program; it leverages the knowledge of local care and shelter subject matter experts in order to develop solution-based approaches in compliance of applicable policies. This creativity manifested in a re-envisioned approach to disaster care and shelter, uniquely created for the concept of dual disaster response. All of which was developed and operationalized in a short period of time. The spirit of innovation is characterized by the ability of a solution to stay relevant over time. Accordingly, it is worth noting that this unique Program has proven to be so effective that the TEP methodology will continue to be used in Santa Barbara County long after the passing of the pandemic. The activation of a TEP takes less time and staff than standing up a traditional congregate shelter, allowing for more immediate community support and greater flexibility in response.

Results:

The creation of the Concurrent Emergency Shelter Program and the associated TEP protocol resulted in the ability to provide safe and expedited emergency care and shelter services to the public despite the perceived fear and actual threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since its creation, the TEP concept has been validated through a proof of concept drill and successful use in two real world responses.

Replicability: The Concurrent Emergency Sheltering Program is easily replicable by any other California County under two conditions; the program team members must be truly representative of the whole county, and executive county leadership must support program team members through executive and political support of county-specific solutions generated by program team members.

Project or Program Contact:

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Additional Materials:

See attached Temporary Evacuation Shelter Directory (not for public posting, unless phone numbers removed) and a template site form.