



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: CEO/Office of
Emergency Services
Department No.: 990
For Agenda Of: Sept. 16, 2008
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Time: 30 mins
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director Michael F. Brown, County Executive Officer
Contact Info: Michael D. Harris, Emergency Operations Chief
681-5526
William H. Boyer, Communications Director
568-3400

SUBJECT: Gap Fire After Action Update and Emergency Public Information

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

- A. That the Board of Supervisors receive an update on Gap Fire After Action Report progress, and emergency public information efforts during the Gap Fire; and
- B. That the Board of Supervisors receive information about establishing a dedicated radio station to provide emergency information to county citizens.

Summary Text:

From July 1, 2008 until July 28, 2008, the Gap Fire burned in the foothills and in the Santa Ynez Mountains of Los Padres National Forest above the City of Goleta, the Santa Barbara City Airport and the unincorporated county. In accordance with the California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) Regulations, Section 2450 (a) mandates that... "Any city, city and county, or county declaring a local emergency for which the governor proclaims a state of emergency shall transmit an after action report to OES (state)..." This administrative briefing is intended to provide the Board with preliminary information and initial findings of the emergency management response to the Gap Fire.

In addition, on August 19, 2008, several community members also requested that the Board of Supervisors consider the development of a single county emergency radio station to serve as the dedicated radio system to provide information to citizens during emergencies. The Board requested that staff examine the development of a radio station(s) program and evaluate previous "lessons learned" to determine what crisis communications system improvements have occurred.

Background:

Gap Fire After Action Report

An After Action Report (AAR) is intended to document response activities and assist staff in identifying both problems and successes that occurred during a response to an emergency. Based on its findings, the AAR also assists in implementing improvements in anticipation of the next emergency. While most agencies that respond to an emergency conduct internal AARs to evaluate their respective agency's response, the County Office of Emergency Services' (OES) AAR evaluates the actions of the OES department, the Operational Area (Op. Area) Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the OES' cooperating jurisdictions and agencies (e.g., City of Goleta, City of Santa Barbara, CHP, CalTrans, etc.).

At the time of the authoring of this Board letter, OES staff had surveyed approximately one-hundred (100) EOC staff (including county employees and employees from other jurisdictions/agencies that were assigned to the EOC). Each section from the EOC (Operations, Logistics, Planning/Intelligence, and Finance) has also had debriefing meetings from OES staff to solicit greater input. The findings of the survey, the discussion groups of the EOC sections and interviews with partnering agencies and individuals are being collected and will be reviewed with members of the Management Section. It is important to underscore that due to Gap Fire recovery efforts and the Gap Fire Burn Area Watershed Project planning, OES is still actively working on the AAR regarding the response to the Gap Fire.

Although the AAR process still requires completion, some preliminary findings of the AAR reveal:

1. The need for initial and ongoing training efforts for staff assigned to the Op Area EOC, including EOC orientation, section training and section chief training. The Employees' University has been involved in this planning effort and has agreed to assist in this strategic priority.
2. A permanent, fully functional EOC. When the Emergency Operations Chief directed the activation of the EOC at approximately 7:30 p.m., July 1, 2008, it took OES and IT staff approximately 2½ hours to set up an operational EOC. Instead of installing computers, faxes, monitors, telephones and unpacking other supplies, a permanently dedicated and equipped EOC would have allowed staff to use this critical time more efficiently in gathering competent intelligence about the incident and sharing that information with EOC sections, cooperating agencies, the news media and the public.
3. Greater cooperation by responding agencies occurred. Actively participating at the Op. Area EOC were numerous cooperating agencies, including the cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta. When compared to previous incidents, the level of jurisdictional cooperation was unprecedented. For example, CalTrans instituted traffic control systems on Highway 101 to prevent persons from entering the high-risk fire areas. These plans were originally developed by the CHP and CalTrans in cooperation with the Sheriff's Department during the Zaca Fire. For the Gap Fire, the plans were revisited and executed in cooperation with the Operations Section of the Op. Area EOC. In addition, the City of Santa Barbara assisted county staff by providing staffing to the Planning & Intelligence Section.

When the full AAR is completed, OES can provide the Board with more detailed information, analysis and recommendations.

Gap Fire Emergency Public Information

Some community members, particularly in the fire-bordering areas, have voiced concerns about the frequency and timeliness of emergency public information provided during some of the active times of

the Gap Fire, especially when evacuation warnings and orders were issued by the Sheriff's Department in support of the Unified Command fighting the fire.

Emergency public information about the Gap Fire originated from the Unified Command with support from the Sheriff's Department. The information, per the SEMS organizational structure, is to go to the Management Section of the EOC, including the Public Information Officer, and is then distributed to the news media and the public. At the same time, the Sheriff's Department is also responsible for engaging the County's Reverse 9-1-1 telephone call system to notify residents of evacuation warnings and orders.

To support the mass distribution of emergency public information, the County's Communications Director has maintained since early 2007 a cooperative agreement (MOU) with several local AM and FM radio stations, including Rincon Broadcasting, Knight Broadcasting, KZSB News-Press Radio and the UC Santa Barbara radio station, whose owners and general managers have agreed to broadcast important emergency information when issued by the County during widespread emergencies.

This MOU agreement was specifically developed by the Communications Director per direction of the County Executive Officer and the Board of Supervisors and in response to the 2005-06 Civil Grand Jury Report on Disaster Preparedness that recommended the County develop agreements with local radio stations for distribution of emergency information.

- The AM stations are: KTMS—990; KZSB—1290; KUHL—1410 and KINF—1440.
- The FM stations are: KCSB—91.9; KSPE—94.5 (Spanish); KSYV—96.7; KTYD—99.9; KSBL—101.7; KRAZ—105.9 and KIST—107.7 (Spanish).

Collectively, the broadcast signals from these stations cover most of the populated areas throughout Santa Barbara County.

According to reports from these radio stations, these stations produced thousands of news reports about the Gap Fire; broadcasting hundreds of hours of news and information to the public. Specifically:

- KZSB provided approximately 1,300 broadcasts, on average once every 15 minutes, including many live broadcasts and interviews.
- The University's radio station at UC Santa Barbara, KCSB, produced approximately 300 news reports during the Gap Fire that lasted from several minutes each to more than an hour long.
- From July 1-8, the Rincon-owned stations produced more than 172 hours of coverage on its stations in English and Spanish, particularly on KIST-FM, KSBL-FM, KSPE-FM, KTMS-AM and KTYD-FM, including 43 hours of coverage during the critical time around July 3 and July 4.
- Rincon's other stations aired an additional 774 updates about the fire.
- In an unprecedented level of cooperation by competing commercial radio stations, Knight Broadcasting took the live feed from the Rincon stations and relayed that directly to its listeners on KUHL 1410 and KINF 1440 AM in addition to airing regular news reports on the fire.
- The MOU stations provided this extensive coverage at no cost to the County or taxpayers, avoiding paid advertising commitments and incurring additional operating costs and staff expenses.

Regarding television news coverage, tracking reports provided to the County indicate:

- More than 2,500 news reports aired on national, statewide and local TV stations from July 1-14, approaching as many as 200 reports daily (total) on the major network news stations, national cable news stations and local television stations.
- Tens of millions of people watched these TV news reports, peaking with a Nielsen TV household viewership level of more than 50 million people on July 5 for ABC's network news coverage.

From July 1 to July 11, County staff working in the EOC's Emergency Public Information Bureau:

- Responded to hundreds of media calls locally and from around the world on a 24/7 basis
- Conducted daily news briefings, many carried live by local television stations
- Wrote and issued approximately 30 bi-lingual press releases in English and Spanish
- Posted all info on County government TV station Channel 20 and to the County's website.
- Translated approximately 15 other press releases from the U.S. Forest Service into Spanish
- Maintained a series of information kiosks throughout the area and took a lead role to help the cities of Goleta and Santa Barbara and the U.S. Forest Service with information for their kiosks.

As part of OES' AAR, staff is evaluating the processes used to develop the emergency information to determine the timeliness and procedures in which the information was received by the EOC from the Unified Command (U.S. Forest Service and County Fire) and from the Sheriff's Department, and the timeliness of distributing that information to the news media and the general public. As part of the Management Section review, the Emergency Operations Chief will be meeting with radio station owners to obtain their perspective of the Gap Fire emergency information flow.

In post-fire conversations already conducted by the Communications Director, the MOU radio station owners and managers have repeated their commitment to work with the County and acknowledge their responsibility to the community in getting emergency information to their listeners at all hours.

In addition, the MOU radio stations have made some recommendations to the Communications Director, including:

- During EOC press briefings, have an open telephone line or conference call bridge that would enable the radio stations to patch in a live feed directly from the EOC to their listeners.
- Create a new position/duty within the EOC's Emergency Public Information Bureau that is dedicated to working directly with the stations for regularly scheduled updates via a conference call that all stations can receive.

Again, these are preliminary findings, and when the full AAR is complete, OES can provide the Board with more details and analysis on the findings and recommendations.

Lesson Learned From Previous Incidents

Supervisor Carbajal also asked that staff evaluate previous incidents that occurred in December 2006 and report to the Board on any public information enhancements made between that time and the recent Gap Fire. While it's clear that improvements have occurred, staff recognizes that more work needs to be done to improve the County's efforts to distribute emergency public information. Specifically:

- The Communications Director will continue to work with all news media outlets and to strengthen the County's ties to the MOU radio stations to improve the widespread broadcasting of emergency information on a 24/7 basis as needed. A further strengthening of communications with the radio stations during a collapse on traditional communications systems (telephone and cellular phones) is addressed under a separate Board item.
- OES will continue to work with the Family Service Agency (FSA) on its capabilities to distribute emergency information via the 2-1-1 call system. Due to budget cuts, FSA initially informed OES that 2-1-1 should not be relied upon for information dissemination during emergencies. Since the

Gap Fire, the Emergency Operations Chief has met with FSA management. FSA management has re-committed itself to providing emergency information via 2-1-1. The FSA continues to address its 2-1-1 funding issues at the state level in order to ensure program viability.

- The County continues to place greater emphasis on its web site for emergency information. During the Gap Fire, some constituents felt information on the County web site to be dated. Again, as part of the AAR, OES staff is evaluating the processes involved in posting information and the timeliness of that information. Recently purchased software now allows easier web site management and is being implemented to streamline web site postings of emergency information.
- Channel 20 has seen a dramatic increase in its use (and reliance upon by the public) during emergencies, including the Zaca and Gap Fires. To enhance delivery of emergency public information, OES has purchased specialized software that allows Ch. 20 staff to access the programming queue and run scrolls on the “lower third” of the screen from remote locations during “after hours” emergencies until staff can return to the station’s broadcasting booth at the administration building.
- For the proposed new EOC, OES is working with the Communications Director, given limited space and funding, to provide Ch. 20 with the ability to broadcast live directly from the EOC rather than depend on equipment at the County Administration Building.
- Staff is also looking into the possibility of establishing a series of remote controlled electronic bulletin boards placed at strategic public gathering places that could be automatically updated from a single location (like the EOC) without having to physically post information on site. These are in wide use by rail transit systems such as BART-Bay Area Rapid Transit, Metrolink, and the City/County of San Francisco Muni System.

Feasibility of a County-operated Radio Station

The Board has asked staff to look into the feasibility of the County owning and operating a single radio station for the purposes of distributing emergency news and information.

As was expressed to the Board on August 19, the County’s legal OES responsibilities are for the entire county – the “Operational Area” –not just the South Coast. Likewise, the County’s responsibility for the dissemination of emergency public information during an EOC activation is also county-wide. Under this requirement and in order to accomplish the county-wide distribution of emergency information, the County would need to own a station with a signal strong enough to reach from Santa Maria to Carpinteria, or to own a network of stations that would accomplish the same task.

Staff estimates that the initial investment to purchase just one radio station license would easily cost between \$1 million to \$2 million in today’s market. Several factors determine the value of a radio station license, including, among others, the availability of the license, the signal strength & bandwidth location allotted to that license, the station’s listener ratings, its advertising base and the desirability of the market itself. The recently completed purchase last month of the license for 1340 AM in Santa Barbara by radio station KCLU (a community radio station based at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks) was reported at about \$1.44 million.

It is important to note that the physical size and mountainous topography of Santa Barbara County makes it impossible to have a single radio station that would serve the entire county. Thus, a comprehensive government-owned and operated radio station network serving the majority of the

county's population in the operational area would require, at a minimum, two, possibly three, commercial-grade AM or FM radio stations.

If three stations are required to provide adequate operational area coverage, the license costs alone would be about \$4.5 million based on the recent sale of the 1340 AM license. In addition, the County would then have the following costs in perpetuity, including: technicians to maintain the system; broadcast staff on-call 24/7 to run the stations and produce emergency information; electricity to broadcast the news; building maintenance; and other costs to maintain (or lease) transmission towers, back-up generators and other specialized equipment for 24/7/365 operational readiness. Based on budget figures for Ch. 20, such reoccurring annual operating costs for just one radio station could be more than \$450,000 per year.

Staff has also evaluated the possibility of low-powered stations, similar to the San Marcos Pass Emergency Radio Station (SMPERS) 1040 AM and the Montecito Emergency Response & Recovery Action Group (MERRAG) station, 1680 AM. At a recent community meeting, staff learned that the MERRAG station cost approximately \$42,000 to begin operations.

On the surface, it would appear that a low-powered station might be more economical, but these types of stations have a limited broadcast radius of about two miles to three miles (depending upon terrain). Accordingly, the County would need a network of at least 50 such stations to achieve adequate coverage over the populated zones within its operational area. This type of network would also exceed a \$2 million start-up cost, plus annual operating expenses.

Having a dedicated radio station (or stations) for emergencies is an inviting idea, but the financial considerations and operational logistics are significant challenges. In addition, staff believes it is a serious strategic mistake for the County to place all of its emergency public information plans on a single station—whether owned/operated by the County or in league with a single commercial operator—as that could be the one station knocked off the air during a major earthquake or other significant disaster.

The County's MOU with existing radio stations provides the county with emergency access to 10 radio station frequencies that provide broadcasting signals throughout the entire county's operational area on both AM and FM bands, in English and Spanish, and at no direct cost to our taxpayers or the County.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: No.

Narrative: There is no fiscal or staffing impacts associated with receiving this Administrative Report.

Authored by:

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