

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD AGENDA LETTER



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
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Agenda Number:
Prepared on: 06/09/05
Department Name: Fire
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Continued Item: NO
If Yes, date from:

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Chief John Scherrei, Fire Department

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SUBJECT: April 30, 2005 Mission Canyon Voluntary Evacuation Drill Lessons Learned, First Supervisorial District

Recommendation(s):

That the Board of Supervisors:
Receive a report on the April 30, 2005 Mission Canyon Voluntary Evacuation Drill regarding lessons learned from conducting this drill.

Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:

The recommendation(s) are primarily aligned with Goal No. 1. An Efficient Government Able to Anticipate and Respond Effectively to the Needs of the Community.

Executive Summary and Discussion:

The purpose of this recommended action is to receive a report on the lessons learned from the April 30, 2005 Mission Canyon Voluntary Evacuation Drill.

The voluntary drill had the collaboration and participation of at least 23 public agencies, private non-profit and volunteer organizations (see Attachment 1) and was viewed as an enormous success by all participants. The objectives for the drill were:

1. Exercise existing evacuation plans.
2. Exercise emergency public information technology (Reverse 9-1-1).
3. Evaluate traffic control points and traffic flow.
4. Capture and evaluate evacuee feedback.

There were several lessons learned from the drill.

Public-Private Collaboration:

The professionalism and collaboration among the agencies and the community members planning the drill was second to none. The drill planning brought together multiple agencies and private organizations under the same umbrella, affording them an excellent opportunity to strengthen lines of communication and working relationships that wouldn't normally be encountered in their day-to-day activities. The planning process itself was key in identifying the issues that surfaced along the way and ultimately ensured that the drill would be a success. Each member of the planning team brought to the table a spirit of cooperation and volunteerism that, if not present in our meetings, would have made it very difficult to strengthen the ties that bind us together in an actual event, thereby allowing participants to improve their existing plans and policies regarding disaster response and recovery.

Public Information, Education and Awareness:

The need for an effective media campaign was determined to be crucial in winning over the hearts and minds of the residents in the target neighborhood, as well as the public at large. As a voluntary drill, it was imperative that public awareness and participation in the event was encouraged. The public information, education and awareness campaign targeting the residential area was handled by the Mission Canyon Association (MCA). Public Information Officers (PIO) from the Fire Department and the Sheriff's Department handled interaction with the local media.

The MCA conducted several door-to-door "walk and talks" during the weeks preceding the drill. These "walk and talks" were instrumental in garnering support from the residents. They also wrote an article in their monthly newsletter and for a local real estate newsletter that was circulated in the area. These articles were informative and designed to encourage the residents to participate in the drill. The MCA also addressed the drill in their monthly board meetings and at their annual homeowner's association meeting attended by several hundred residents. Beginning April 1st, media releases were issued to the local media about the drill. Local media were very supportive and provided time on local radio and television talk shows. A radio interview about the drill took place several weeks before the drill. A television interview about the drill took place two weeks before the drill. There was even a radio talk show promoting the drill as it was occurring.

The effectiveness of the public information campaign was readily apparent given the response of the residents of the Mission Canyon areas, as well as the support shown by the general public. The ability to raise public awareness about these types of events is key to preparation and mitigation strategies for all emergency response elements and volunteer organizations.

Reverse 9-1-1 Notification System:

Overall the software application and the user interface performed as delivered. This was the first real-time test of the newly upgraded automatic notification system. The Reverse 9-1-1 System is an upgrade to the Geo-Notify System that was used during the January 10, 2005 evacuation in the San Antonio neighborhood. There was one glitch that caused a delay with early notifications when the system tried to commandeer existing County's telephone lines with the "*line manager*" component and duplicated efforts three times. The system utilizes twenty-four (24) outbound phone lines. A block of six (6) phone lines experienced an electronic connectivity problem between the server room and the phone company. The Reverse 9-1-1 server recognized the phone lines as part of its configuration. The phone company did not receive the attempted calls from each of the affected lines. In the end, a significant number of calls (nearly one third of the totals) were entered into each session's report as "no ring". Sheriff's Department personnel were able to immediately contact the Reverse 9-1-1 technical support, diagnose and correct the problem within one hour.

The fourth and final trial provided the best indication of what R-911 is capable of doing. After debugging the system, the “All-Clear” message was a successful implementation and the earlier problem was corrected. By the time that the final trial was begun, the Reverse 9-1-1 *line manager* was successfully able to remove the six faulty phone lines from the call queue and ran the session. The result was that 223 “no rings” were reduced to zero.

The system is well designed, capable, and now has every facet tested to its limit. This set of trials was designed to duplicate anomalies in order that they be accurately identified and corrected. That goal was accomplished. There are plans to create a more robust link between the Reverse 9-1-1 server and Verizon’s phone lines.

It is important to note that law enforcement and the Los Padres Search and Rescue (LPSAR) team were simultaneously notifying residents with patrol cars using their public address (P.A.) system and the LPSAR effecting the evacuation by knocking on each resident’s front door. Redundancy of public notification is the key to any evacuation. In a real emergency there would also be press releases, Code 20 pages, live media interviews, Emergency Alert System, radio broadcasts, etc. being issued to alert the public and provide emergency information.

In addition, a second, redundant Reverse 9-1-1 system is being planned for installation in the City of Lompoc’s public safety dispatch center. Both Reverse 9-1-1 systems will have duplicative capabilities. For example, the Sheriff’s system could provide notification for any area within the county, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. Similarly, the Lompoc dispatch system would be able to do the same.

Traffic Flow Patterns:

A great deal of time and consideration was given to this aspect of the drill. Due to the congestion of housing, narrow and steep roads, and abundant vegetation in the area gave cause for concern to the planning committee. These traffic concerns identified early on turned out to be a non-issue due to glitches in the Reverse 9-1-1 System. According to the post-drill surveys, residents waited in their homes until they received the Reverse 9-1-1 call on their telephone. Therefore, instead of several hundred residents being notified all at once event, the process took an estimated 45 minutes. In effect, these notification delays dissipated the traffic flow and the anticipated traffic choke points did not occur. In an actual disaster or major fire event, traffic issues will invariably rise to the top and become a key element in effective command and control. This drill gave emergency response agencies an invaluable opportunity to evaluate how to effectively manage this issue.

Conclusion:

This type of voluntary evacuation drill was extremely valuable. The Fire Safe Council and agencies are supportive of planning a similar pilot evacuation drill in other high fire hazard areas. Drill participants agree that the drill objectives were met. A summary how the objectives were met is provided below.

1. *Exercise existing evacuation plans.* All participating agencies looked forward to the opportunity to test existing plans and make changes as deemed appropriate from the lessons learned.
2. *Exercise emergency public information technology (Reverse 9-1-1).* With the installation of the new communications program, the drill was an excellent opportunity to test the new system in a mock scenario.

3. *Evaluate traffic control points and traffic flow.* There has been considerable concern by both public and private agencies, as well as local residents that this would pose a problem in the event of an actual emergency.
4. *Capture and evaluate evacuee feedback.* Public agencies all agreed that this would be an excellent way to heighten awareness of what was being done and to capture valuable data from the drill.

Mandates and Service Levels:

The real-time evacuation drill provided a valuable experience for public safety agencies. In addition, it allowed the Sheriff's Department to conduct a full-scale test of the Reverse 9-1-1 System rather than simulation. This allowed a previously unknown glitch to be diagnosed and remedied during the drill. Overall evacuation preparedness increased as a result of the drill.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

None

Special Instructions:

None

Concurrence:

None

Attachment 1

”SAFE CANYON”
Mission Canyon Voluntary Evacuation Drill

Participating Residents

Approximately 200 Residents of Mission Heights

Participating Agencies & Entities

Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES)
American Medical Response (AMR)
American Red Cross (ARC)
Board of Supervisors - First District Office
California Highway Patrol - Santa Barbara
Earl Warren Showgrounds
Fire Safe Council
Gelson's Market
Los Padres Forest Service
Mission Canyon Association (MCA)
Montecito Fire Protection District
Santa Barbara Botanic Garden
Santa Barbara City Fire Department
Santa Barbara City Police Department
Santa Barbara City Public Works Department
Santa Barbara County Fire Department
Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Services
Santa Barbara County Public Works Department
Santa Barbara County Search and Rescue
Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department
Trader Joe's Market
Wildland Residents Association