

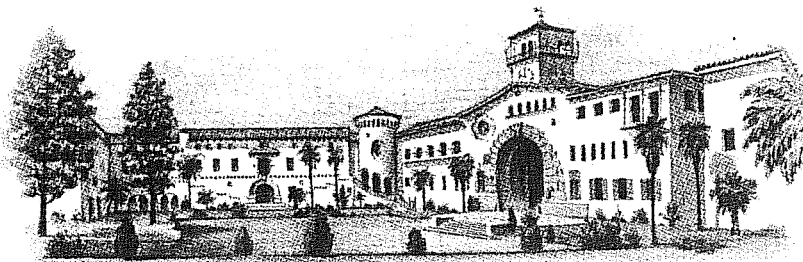
SALUD CARBAJAL
First District

JANET WOLF
Second District, Vice Chair

DOREEN FARR
Third District

JONI GRAY
Fourth District

JOSEPH CENTENO
Fifth District, Chair



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

County Administration Building

105 East Anapamu Street

Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Telephone: (805) 568-2190

www.countyofsb.org

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

June 16, 2009

Honorable Judge J. William McLafferty
Santa Barbara County Superior Court
1100 Anacapa St., 2nd Floor
Santa Barbara, CA 93121-1107

Board of Supervisors' responses to Fiscal Year 2008-2009 Grand Jury Report on 'Santa Barbara County Emergency Communications – Further Improvement Needed'

Dear Judge McLafferty:

During its regular meeting on June 16, 2009, the Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted the following as the Board's response to the relevant findings and recommendations in their Fiscal Year 2008-2009 Grand Jury Report entitled "Santa Barbara County Emergency Communications – Further Improvement Needed."

SUMMARY

As highlighted in previous Grand Jury reports, the challenges associated with working out of an interim Emergency Operations Center (EOC) continues to impact the County's emergency managers' response capabilities, including delivery of emergency information to the public and the news media. Despite the limitations of a non-permanent EOC, County staff continues to proactively work with various emergency and non-emergency personnel, public information professionals, members of the news media, volunteer organizations and other jurisdictional and civilian groups or individuals to improve the delivery of emergency public information.

The Board of Supervisors wishes to thank the Grand Jury for its report. The Board of Supervisors also agrees with the Grand Jury that improvements have been made and further improvements are always possible and desirable.

BACKGROUND

Emergencies occur every day in Santa Barbara County and most incidents are efficiently handled at a local level, including interaction with the news media, and do not require activation of the County's interim Emergency Operations Center or countywide emergency public information protocols.

When a single incident becomes—or is likely to grow—much larger in size and complexity, or impacts multiple jurisdictions, the interim EOC can be activated to assist in management of the incident(s), including distribution of emergency public information.

Activating the EOC creates an opportunity for public information professionals from those jurisdictions and agencies involved to work together in an effort to communicate with the public in an organized “single voice” that reduces duplication or contradictions and improves the timely distribution of emergency public information.

A system of coordinated emergency information delivered to the news media and the public can be best provided through a “Joint Information Center” (JIC). The JIC provides the physical location where the public information professionals from the various organizations and agencies responding to the emergency can work together to ensure that timely, accurate, easy-to-understand and consistent information is disseminated to the public. The Board of Supervisors supports the use of JICs for multijurisdictional incidents that require a high degree of information coordination.

To be effective, the JIC must include public information officers and support staff from each organization involved in the incident. The Grand Jury recognized the successful formation of a JIC for the Tea Fire. The Grand Jury also discussed the need for an immediate JIC opening that coincides with the EOC opening. While the Board of Supervisors supports the use of a JIC, the Board also is aware that without a permanent EOC, it takes the County up to three hours to convert the existing classroom training facility—a modular, “temporary” structure—into a functional, interim EOC that currently does not have space for a JIC or the public Call Center operated by the County during the Jesusita, Tea and Gap fires.

The Board of Supervisors is also supportive of the County’s efforts, meanwhile, to partner with local news media organizations to strengthen the County’s abilities to provide emergency public information in the critical time while both the interim EOC and a JIC are being prepared. The Board notes that the County’s current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the County and several local radio stations is part of the positive efforts to improve the delivery of time-sensitive emergency public information.

While the Grand Jury’s report recommends that the County focus on two radio stations, the County, since 2007, has been working with numerous radio stations in order to have as many radio stations as possible that can be available in case some stations are damaged or knocked off the air due to a major earthquake or other disaster. The County also has sought to utilize stations already familiar to, and trusted by, their regular listeners; including the local Spanish-speaking community.

The Board’s responses below will show that the County has been proactive in its strategic plans for disseminating emergency public information and that the County is taking steps to further improve its efforts to build redundancy into those communication plans.

RESPONSES TO FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1a: Contrary to statements by the CEO and the Office of Emergency Services, there are two radio stations that cover the entire County.

Response: Partially Agree.

The Grand Jury report indicates that two FM radio stations, KRUZ, 97.5 and KVYB, 103.3, provide county-wide coverage. The Board of Supervisors agrees that the signals from these, and other, radio stations are transmitted throughout Santa Barbara County. However, local mountains, canyons, the atmosphere and other environmental factors can have an impact on the public’s ability to clearly receive and hear those signals. A radio station’s broadcast area is no guarantee that the signal can actually be heard, and the Board understands that County staff has found numerous places where the signals fail to reach, including areas near the Gaviota tunnels on Highway 101; in canyon areas and other spots throughout the county.

It is also important to note that both radio stations referenced by the Grand Jury are not Spanish-language format and the County must partner with radio stations that already broadcast in Spanish in order to reach (approximately 30 percent) of Santa Barbara County’s total households whose primary language is Spanish.

In an effort to improve distribution of emergency public information when the interim EOC is activated, County staff in 2007 initiated discussions with local radio stations to enhance the broadcasting of critical information. The result was the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with several radio stations that broadcast on AM and FM frequencies, in English and Spanish formats, throughout the County. These stations already have worked cooperatively with the County and with each other, faithfully providing hundreds of hours of news and emergency information—at times foregoing paid advertising—during the Zaca, Gap, Tea and Jesusita fires without any cost to the County or the taxpayers.

In 2009, the County's Office of Emergency Services (OES) further strengthened the MOU and the County's cooperative relationship with many of the MOU radio stations by designating them as part of the "Radio Ready" program. Approved by the Board of Supervisors, Radio Ready has placed sophisticated mobile Inmarsat satellite telecommunications equipment, with full broadband wireless Internet, at the stations to communicate, via satellite, directly with the interim EOC facility in the event that a disaster knocks out fiber optic systems, land lines and cell phone towers.

These "Radio Ready" stations—at their own expense, not the County or the taxpayers—have agreed to maintain operational readiness with generators, fuel and other emergency supplies, plus staffing commitments, at both their studios and transmitter sites in exchange for the Inmarsat systems, funding for which was generously donated to the County by the Orfalea Foundation.

County staff, meanwhile, continues to meet with local radio stations owners and management to further refine the MOU; including discussions to expand activation authority to city emergency services directors for isolated large incidents within a city; and to clarify protocols for dependable communications with radio broadcasters.

Finding 1b: The County has not established specific airtimes with any radio station to air emergency broadcasts.

Response: Agree.

It is difficult to establish specific airtimes prior to an incident. Prior to the Grand Jury report, however, County staff had been engaging the MOU radio stations, TV stations and other members of the local press corps in "roundtable discussions" to develop ways to improve the frequency of emergency communications based on the media representatives' own suggestions.

Part of those discussions resulted in the County offering to "embed" a local broadcast news media representative with the Public Information Officer's staff at the interim EOC, which would allow that outlet to broadcast live from the EOC whenever—and for as long as—the outlet wanted to do so, but no outlet has accepted the offer, including during the recent Jesusita Fire.

The County did provide working space for the San Marcos Pass Emergency Radio System (SMPERS) within the Public Information area during the Gap Fire and SMPERS did provide regular broadcasts from the interim EOC. During the Jesusita Fire, meanwhile, the County did establish a regular schedule for press conferences, primarily at 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., which most TV media covered with live TV coverage. Many of the local radio stations generally did not carry the press conferences live. In order to help radio stations with live coverage, the County currently is testing equipment to provide a telephonic "conference bridge" that would enable radio stations to obtain a live audio output feed during press conferences or other briefings so that the stations can provide live broadcasts from a remote site.

Recommendation 1: That the County negotiate a purchase of airtime with a countywide radio station to broadcast emergency messages at specific times.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented.

The Board of Supervisors supports County staff's plans to pursue relationships with as many radio stations as possible in order to provide multiple pathways for emergency news since there are no guarantees that any specific radio station(s) selected for the purchase of an airtime contract would actually survive a catastrophic disaster such as an earthquake.

Spending taxpayer money on one radio station or designating one radio station as THE radio resource for emergency public information is a mistake since all radio and TV stations are susceptible to a catastrophic earthquake, or other disasters, which could cause any of the local stations to go off the air for indefinite periods of time.

The 2006 earthquake in Hawaii serves an important reminder of this fact. On October 15, 2006, at 7:08 a.m., HST, a 6.7-magnitude earthquake occurred in the vicinity of Kiholo Bay, Hawai'i, and approximately 80 percent of all media stations statewide were knocked off the air, according to the January 5, 2007 report by the Hawaii Governor's Comprehensive Communications Review Committee.ⁱⁱ The earthquake resulted in power outages, fears of a Tsunami and the loss of all but a "handful" of radio stations primarily due to electrical outages or problems with transmitter tower sites.^{iii iv} According to the UC Davis Geology Department, an 8.3-magnitude earthquake in the LA basin will result in "*(Perhaps) half the radio stations will be put off the air*."

To better serve our residents, businesses and visitors, the Board of Supervisors supports the County's partnership with as many radio stations as possible so that we have multiple, redundant means to communicate with the public and the news media during major emergencies or disasters.

Further, the current Grand Jury recommendation would, if adopted, weaken the County's MOU system already in place which a previous Grand Jury had recommended that the County pursue. Using taxpayer money to purchase airtime for emergency information purposes with a non-MOU station could prompt the MOU radio stations to withdraw from the agreement since they already work cooperatively with the County at no cost to the public.

The Board of Supervisors wishes to congratulate the efforts of the MOU broadcasters who have consistently reiterated their commitment to broadcasting critical emergency public information without the need for an advertising contract, since, as the federally licensed users of the public airwaves, they recognize their responsibility to provide the public with the emergency information.

Finding 2: The County did not activate the Emergency Alert System in either the Gap or the Tea Fires to notify the public about mandatory evacuations.

Response: Agree.

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is built on an aging architecture conceived in the 1950s^{vi}. EAS (originally referred to as the Emergency Broadcast System (EBS)) was created in 1963 as a mechanism for the President of the United States to speak with the public during a national emergency such as a nuclear war. Local emergency officials may request broadcasters to transmit emergency information using the EAS, however, County staff has determined that they cannot force broadcasters to use the EAS for local emergencies. The Federal Communications Commission has previously ruled that the broadcasters, not the state or local authority, have the final authority to transmit a message^{vii}.

The County did not activate the EAS in either the Gap or Tea fires because the antiquated EAS does not have a robust television component that allows for additional information beyond the emergency alert headline to be communicated. Many people have commented to County staff with concerns about insufficient information transmitted on television during EAS alerts. Scrolls such as "*Civil authorities have issued an Amber Alert, Santa Barbara County*" have caused frustration with the viewing public. The EAS has continually revealed so many shortcomings, particularly in the lack of information provided on television, that the EAS was not used during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks^{viii}.

If OES had activated the EAS evacuation code during the Tea Fire, tens-of-thousands of KEYT viewers would have received the following limited message, "*Civil Authorities, Evacuation Order, Santa Barbara County Evacuation.*"

The Board of Supervisors supports the County's efforts to communicate with the news media and the public through multiple paths. EAS remains a potential communication tool despite its limited technology and County staff continues to explore alternative ways to use and improve EAS.

Recommendation 2: That the Office of Emergency Services activate the Emergency Alert System in accordance with the Santa Barbara County Emergency Alert System Plan.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented.

The EAS is of limited use and, at times, its activation can cause unnecessary fear and panic by our citizens. Due to its limitations, EAS should not be relied upon for regional emergency information.

The County already engages multiple pathways to alert the public about evacuations, including, among other means, the Reverse 9-1-1[®] system, e-mail blasts and faxes to the news media and other groups, public address systems on squad cars and helicopters, cooperative agreements with local radio stations, the use of the County's government TV station and website, bulletin boards, door-to-door contact, press conferences and press releases. In addition, the Board supports County staff's on-going efforts to explore new technologies and methods that are more efficient than the EAS.

Finding 3: There was no Joint Information Center during the course of the Gap Fire. The Joint Information Center was not set up until 21 hours after the start of the Tea Fire.

Response: Partially Agree.

During the Gap Fire, the Public Information function in the County's interim EOC had public information officers from a variety of agencies and jurisdictions working together at various times in the same room, including the County, school officials, City of Goleta, California Highway Patrol and the U.S. Forest Service. The Public Information Officer and staff also kept in regular contact with information officers for the fire agencies involved, the local utilities, CalTrans, the City of Santa Barbara and volunteer agencies like the Red Cross. Although County staff did not formally name it as a Joint Information Center (JIC), the Public Information area was working collaboratively as a JIC.

The County also established a public Call Center after the U.S. Forest Service's Call Center became overwhelmed due several other fires burning within the Los Padres National Forest. The County Call Center also acted as a coordinated point for the release of joint information.

The Board of Supervisors acknowledges that post-incident discussions clearly revealed, however, that communication efforts needed improvement. Communication issues regarding the clarity and consistency of evacuation information were particularly problematic during the rapidly changing times of the Gap Fire when a series of evacuation orders or warnings were quickly issued by the Incident Commanders. As a result of the findings, and to improve the coordinated release of emergency information, numerous discussions have occurred regarding the proactive use of a JIC and significantly stronger information ties between the Incident Commanders and the Public Information Officer at the interim EOC.

During the Tea Fire, County staff moved immediately to activate the interim EOC, including activation plans for a JIC. By the time a JIC location was identified and equipped—and the appropriate agencies and jurisdictions agreed to support it and assign staff—the Tea Fire JIC was opened as quickly as possible the following afternoon. Full-time staffing came from the U.S. Forest Service, CalFire, several departments from the County—including CEO, OES, Sheriff and Fire—the cities of Goleta and Santa Barbara, the Red Cross and several other agencies. It was the first time a JIC was formally established and successfully operated in the County during a real large-scale emergency.

The Board of Supervisors supports the operations of a JIC and recognizes that the timeframe to establish a JIC needs to be improved, if possible. The lessons learned in the Tea and Jesusita fires will be used to enhance the County's emergency information delivery systems; much as the Grand Jury noted about the improvements in communications from the Gap Fire to the Tea Fire.

Recommendation 3: When the Emergency Operations Center is set up, the Joint Information Center should be activated immediately.

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the Grand Jury's recommendation that opening a JIC in concert with the opening of the EOC is optimal. Every emergency is different, however, and immediately opening a JIC might not be possible, or required. In order to best serve the public's emergency information needs, the Board supports County staff's pursuit of cooperative relationships with public information professionals from the cities and other agencies within the county's Operational Area so that they are prepared to issue joint press statements and other joint emergency information as quickly as possible during emergencies, whether or not a physical JIC is ultimately established for any specific emergency.

The Board recognizes that a JIC's success to distribute joint emergency information in support of a unified command structure is dependent on there first being an emergency with a unified command response for the incident and, second, the ability to bring together the various public information staff from the federal, state, county and local agencies that are responding to the emergency. JICs historically are formed a few days into a major disaster once all of the various agencies have arrived and the emergency public information duties can be efficiently passed from the EOC to the JIC.

Also, due to the lack of a permanent EOC, the County's current focus continues to be on first using its limited available staffing and other resources to open a fully operational interim EOC to support the incident management priorities.

Finding 4: In an emergency, the Santa Barbara Independent and the City of Goleta send out e-mail alerts to their subscribers. The County of Santa Barbara has not set up a similar alert system.

Response: Partially Agree.

The Board of Supervisors agrees that the City of Goleta and the Independent sent out e-mail text alerts to their respective subscribers.

The County's website does feature an automated "RSS" feed for subscribers on the website's Press Release page, where emergency information is posted to automatically alert subscribers when the press release page is updated.

The Reverse 9-1-1[®] system operated by the Sheriff's Department has multiple, existing capabilities involving e-mail and text messaging and the Sheriff's Department is working to more fully realize the Reverse 9-1-1[®] capabilities and is exploring partnerships with cities to further utilize the system.

County staff, meanwhile is exploring other Internet, e-mail and texting options, including the use of the new generation of "social media" sites such as Twitter, FaceBook and others. While some of these sites may be available at no cost to the County or its residents, other systems may require policy direction and funding allocation by the Board of Supervisors.

Recommendation 4: That the County develop an e-mail alert system which would cover all residents in the County.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable.

The County already uses several electronic, telephonic and other means to contact the public and the news media during emergencies and the Board of Supervisors supports the emergency planning efforts by staff to engage as many pathways as possible to ensure that the highest percentage of residents, businesses and visitors can be contacted during an emergency. No one system is fool proof and it is unlikely that one system can cover—or should be depended up to reach—every resident in the County. Multiple pathways must be used in case one or more system fails during a catastrophic event. In addition, these multiple platforms are best achieved through a consistent source that combines responding jurisdictions or agencies in a JIC as part of the EOC operations.

As new systems, technologies and methods of communication becomes available, the Board of Supervisors supports the efforts of the County's emergency planners and managers to explore ways to best utilize the new systems for mass alerts.

Finding 5: The Reverse 9-1-1[®] system can be an effective method of notifying residents. However, it has had limited coverage in the County, communications are limited to English and many homeowners may not receive messages for a variety of reasons.

Response: Partially agree.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the Grand Jury that the Sheriff's Department use of the Reverse 9-1-1[®] system for mass telephonic notification of emergency information is indeed effective. The Board also supports the Sheriff's Department continued use of the current system to notify as many citizens and businesses as possible in the unincorporated areas of the county as well as within the cities of Buellton, Solvang, Goleta, Guadalupe and Carpinteria where the Department maintains cooperative agreements to use the alert system.

The Board understands that the Sheriff's Department continues to expand the system by working with telephone service providers to regularly update the system's database and by registering thousands of additional telephone numbers registered by citizens on the Sheriff's Department website. The system has the potential to cover the entire county, however, some cities outside the Sheriff's Department jurisdiction have opted to utilize different systems, thereby limiting its reach.

The Board agrees that the current system sends messages in English, but the Board understands that the Sheriff's Department is working to expand the system with Spanish-language messages. Further, the Board acknowledges that, for a variety of reasons, it is possible that some homeowners may not receive emergency calls for a variety of reasons. This is another reason why the Board supports County staff's efforts to use multiple pathways to reach our citizens with emergency information.

Recommendation 5a: That the Sheriff's Department inform and educate all County residents about the Reverse 9-1-1[®] system.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

The Board of Supervisors supports the continual efforts of the Sheriff's Department to inform and educate the public and all other agencies and jurisdictions within the County about the benefits of using the Reverse 9-1-1[®] system.

Recommendation 5b: That the Sheriff's Department monitor and improve the Reverse 9-1-1[®] system to reach all residents, including those who are Spanish speaking.

Response: The recommendation has implemented.

The Board of Supervisors recognizes the importance of bilingual emergency public information in all formats used by the County's emergency managers, including the Reverse 9-1-1[®] system, in order to reach the Spanish-speaking community. The Board supports the Sheriff's Department efforts to improve the system and to partner with all other agencies and jurisdictions within the County to utilize the system to its full potential.

The Sheriff's Department has already indicated it is pursuing options to include Spanish language messages on its emergency alerts.

FOOTNOTES

ⁱ http://www.fema.gov/txt/nims/nims_doc1.txt Chapter I NIMS – Introduction and Overview

ⁱⁱ *Recommendations for Improving Public Communications During Emergencies*, Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle's Governor's Comprehensive Communications Review Committee, January 5, 2007, Final Report (attached)

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://nytimes.com/2006/10/15/us/15cnd-quake.html?pagewanted...> NewYorkTime.com October 2006

^{iv} <http://honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2006/Oct/17/op/...> Honoluluadvertiser.com October 2006

^v <https://www.geology.ucdavis.edu/~cowen/~gel115/quakenotes.html> Cowen, Richard PhD U Davis Geology Department

^{vi} *The Emergency Alert System (EAS) and All-Hazard Warnings* Congressional Research Service, Moore, et al. 2008

^{vii} FCC, *Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making*, Released December 9, 1994

^{viii} Collins, Glenn (December 21, 2001), "The Silence of the Alert System; Experts Urge Overhaul of Plan Unused Even on Sept. 11", *New York Times* Section D (Column 2; Metropolitan Desk) Sincerely,

Honorable Judge J. William McLafferty

Sincerely,

Joseph Centeno
Board of Supervisors, Chair

cc: Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury Foreman

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Further Improvement Needed

SUMMARY

There are few issues which affect everyone in Santa Barbara County as directly as emergency communications. When there is an emergency, information needs to be accurate, available and updated regularly. Information should come from many different sources and be available to the entire County, not limited to either the north or south.

There were significant improvements in communication between the time of the Gap Fire and the Tea Fire. Recommendations in this report are designed to further improve communications, and are not meant to detract from the excellent performance of many people in the County, including all safety personnel and workers in both the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)¹ and the Joint Information Center (JIC).

A JIC should be set up immediately when an emergency starts, and no later than when the EOC is activated. There was no JIC for the Gap Fire, and one was not in operation for 21 hours after the Tea Fire began. The *Santa Barbara Independent* and the City of Goleta both have initiated an e-mail based alert to notify their subscribers and provide updates when there are emergencies. Such a service is a tremendous benefit in keeping residents fully informed. The County of Santa Barbara provides no such service. The 2008-2009 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury determined it is not adequate to rely on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the County and 11 radio stations to disseminate information. The Jury believes this issue should be reevaluated by including County-wide radio stations.

This report will address several of these communication areas, with specific recommendations for each. These recommendations are not all-inclusive. The County must continue to take the initiative to research and seek out other forms of communication to ensure that local residents are informed in an emergency.

BACKGROUND

In any emergency it is critical that the public be informed regularly. The information has to be current, available and it has to be accurate. The public needs to know where to obtain and how to quickly access information. The citizens of Santa Barbara County are fortunate to have local media coverage during an emergency. KEYT television and

¹ Definitions for terms can be found in the Glossary at the end of this report.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

various radio stations broadcast continual coverage of the Tea Fire. Even professional safety personnel watched KEYT to receive current information about the fire.

In an emergency, the first senior person on the scene becomes the Incident Commander. It is this person's responsibility to notify key people in the County the type and location of an emergency. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) can then be activated by any of the following: the County Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Assistant CEO, the Director of the Office of Emergency Services (OES), the Sheriff or the Fire Chief. The EOC currently is housed in modular buildings which are primarily used as the County Employee University. Since the EOC is not dedicated and is used for other purposes, activation takes two to three hours. When in operation, the EOC coordinates all affected departments, including communications.

The 2008-2009 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury was able to observe the effectiveness of County communications during two emergencies: the Gap and Tea Fires. Communications in the Gap Fire were seriously deficient. The public received contradictory information, and the information and maps were frequently dated. When the Tea Fire started in November, it was clear that the County had focused on correcting some of the earlier problems. Once the Emergency Operating Center (EOC) was activated, information during the fire was current and was immediately put on the County website. There were frequent press releases, and maps were largely accurate and available on-line. Nevertheless problems persisted.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting its investigation, the Grand Jury interviewed the following:

- Senior officials in both the Fire and Sheriff's Departments
- Public Information Officers (PIOs) from the following departments:
 - Sheriff's Department
 - County Fire Department
 - Santa Barbara County
 - City of Goleta
- Officials from the City of Goleta
- Director of the OES
- Santa Barbara County Chief Executive Officer and Assistant Chief Executive Officer
- Several people from the media, including a television announcer, radio engineer and former radio station owner
- Leaders of the Emergency Public Information Center (EPIC)
- Two County supervisors who were directly involved in the two fires
- OES Director, San Luis Obispo County
- Program Administrator for the Ventura OES

In addition, the Grand Jury visited the following sites:

- The Santa Barbara County EOC during the first full day of

the Tea Fire

- The Joint Information Center (JIC) during the Tea Fire
- The Ventura County EOC
- The Sheriff's Department Operations Center (DOC) and one of its Command vehicles
- Sheriff's Communication Center

While the Grand Jury had the opportunity to observe the effectiveness of communications during the two fires, the investigation of the Jury was not restricted to fires, but all types of emergencies.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The Grand Jury recognizes the effort that was undertaken to improve communications after the Gap Fire. By the time of the Tea Fire, more effort was made to keep the County's Channel 20 and its website current, and a JIC was activated. As with all emergency efforts, special recognition must be given to the Fire and Sheriff's Departments for their hard work and efficiency in ensuring that information communicated to the public was accurate and current. The above notwithstanding, the Jury found areas where the County can and should improve emergency communications.

Emergencies can take place anywhere in the County. The County could be divided in the event of a major emergency such as an earthquake that closes Highway 101 and/or San Marcos Pass. A variety of emergencies could isolate sections of the County. Citizens need to know where an emergency has taken place, and what they need to do. An emergency brings up a myriad of urgent questions. Should I pack my belongings? Should I be prepared to evacuate? Where do I take my animals? Are there shelters, and if so, where are they? Where will medical care be provided?

Citizens need to know where and how to obtain emergency information quickly. They have no time to search radio stations to obtain current emergency information while they are packing belongings, gathering children and herding animals. The information must be accurate and not contradictory.

No one method of communication is adequate. Electricity may be out, so televisions, radios and computers may not be usable. Battery operated radios may be one way to receive information. Kiosks throughout an affected area may be another way to receive updates. Websites must be continually updated and easily located by all citizens. There is a system designated Reverse 911® which allows officials to alert the public by telephone in an emergency. However, this system may not work for all areas, and each home may not have a telephone which will receive a Reverse 911® call when electrical power is unavailable.

This report will address several of these communication areas, with specific recommendations for each.

Radio Communications

In response to a report by the 2005-2006 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury, the County CEO stated: "There is no single radio station that will provide coverage for the entire geographical boundaries of the County." Based on this mistaken belief, the County chose to work with multiple radio stations rather than develop a single source of information.

In early 2007, the County entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with four AM and seven FM radio stations. This MOU recognized the role the County and the radio stations have in providing continual emergency communications. While the MOU requires both parties to cooperate, it does not specify how or when the radio stations will transmit information. A pertinent paragraph from the MOU is as follows:

The MOU participants agree to broadcast the County's emergency public information to its listeners on a regular basis throughout the duration of the emergency. It is the responsibility of each of the MOU radio station participants to determine a regular broadcast schedule and repetition for the county-provided emergency public information, which could include, but is not limited to, the pre-empting of regularly scheduled programming as determined appropriate by the MOU participants.

Nowhere does the MOU state when broadcasts will take place, as that is left up to individual stations. Furthermore, none of these stations covers the entire County, so one station might cover Santa Barbara, while another would cover Santa Maria.

Following the Gap Fire in July, 2008, the Board of Supervisors asked the County CEO to look into the feasibility of the County's owning and operating a single radio station for the purpose of distributing emergency news and information. In its September 16, 2008 written response to this request, the CEO and Office of Emergency Services (OES) pointed out the obligation of the County to cover its entire area in an emergency. They also pointed out the exorbitant costs involved in purchasing and then maintaining a station. They then went on to state:

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, possible three, commercial-grade AM or FM stations.

The Grand Jury has determined that this statement is incorrect.

KRUZ-FM (97.5) and KVYB-FM (103.3) both cover the entire County. In fact they cover more than just Santa Barbara County, and extend into both Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties. KRUZ and KVYB are both located on hardened sites on Broadcast

Peak. Neither station has signed the MOU. In addition, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that KUSC was negotiating to purchase an FM station in Santa Maria. When finalized, KUSC also would cover the entire County, plus Los Angeles, Ventura and Palm Springs.

The Grand Jury agrees that the cost of acquiring a radio station would be prohibitive; however, the County could buy time on one or both of these stations, to be used only in emergencies. The length of time of the broadcast could be limited to one or two minutes, and be pre-scheduled to be broadcast at set times. The cost would be minimal compared to purchasing a station. The County would have control over the message, the public would know where and when it could receive emergency information, and the entire County would be covered. Rather than searching among 11 stations with no knowledge of when information will be broadcast, residents could access a single source at specific times.

Emergency Alert System (EAS)

Formerly known as the Emergency Broadcast System, the EAS is mandated by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to allow the President of the United States to communicate with the public in the event of a national emergency. Certain local agencies also can activate the EAS. According to the Santa Barbara County Emergency Alert System Plan, these agencies are the National Weather Service, the Office of Emergency Services and authorized public officials of the incorporated cities of Santa Barbara County.

Each radio station broadcasts the EAS message. The stations have the right to delay the message up to 15 minutes to fit with local broadcasts, but most choose to relay it without delay. EAS can also be used for television, where the message scrolls across the screen.

The EAS is not designed to be used as a press release. It is strictly to be used to describe an emergency. So, for example, it could describe areas of mandatory evacuation, or provide an emergency broadcast of a dam break or chemical spills. EAS also can be localized, so that the broadcast could be limited to certain areas in the County.

The activation of the EAS to announce mandatory evacuations in the Gap and Tea Fires would have been one more method of direct communication for the public.

Joint Information Center (JIC)

According to the Santa Barbara County's Emergency Operations Plan², one of the EOC's responsibilities is to provide information and instructions to the public. This dissemination is best done through a JIC, activated immediately after the emergency has been detected. In the past, it has not been an integral part of emergency operations. Its

² The official name of the document detailing the EOC operation is *Santa Barbara Operational Area Emergency Operations Center (EOC)*.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

establishment was delayed by one day in the Tea Fire. The JIC will increase the public's confidence in emergency communication, and it will decrease the risk that inaccurate information will be distributed to the public. The County Public Information Officer (PIO) should be present and in charge of the JIC.

A JIC is designed to provide timely, accurate and complete emergency information to the public. It is composed of a group of PIOs from local, state, federal and private organizations who handle public information needs during an emergency. They meet as a group, and jointly issue press releases. The JIC should integrate easily with the Incident Commander and the EOC, and the members of the JIC can be adjusted to meet the needs of any emergency. Key members of the JIC in one emergency may not be the key members in another. The existence of a JIC may make the difference between the public perceiving an incident to be under control or out of control.

If the PIOs are working jointly, there is instant and regular communication between them and chances of contradictory information being passed to the public are greatly reduced. If a key PIO operates independently he may very well not receive timely information from other PIOs.

In the Gap Fire there was no JIC and information was contradictory, frequently inaccurate and often out-of-date. The public widely complained about the lack of good communication. In the Tea Fire a JIC was established and staffed by multiple agencies. The JIC issued press releases which were broadcast and which appeared regularly on the County website. Regrettably, however, the JIC was not set up until late Friday afternoon, 21 hours after the Tea Fire started. When the Jury visited the JIC, representatives were present from the Fire and Sheriff's Departments, Cal Fire, the United States Forest Service, and the County. Other agencies may have arrived after Jury members left.

E-Mail Alerts to the Public

During the Gap Fire, the *Santa Barbara Independent* website had the most current and accurate updates. It was the first to indicate who should be evacuated, and it was the first to describe who could return home. Following the Gap Fire, the *Independent* set up its *IndyAlert*, which describes emergencies and provides local information to subscribers by e-mail. There is no cost to the subscriber. It is effective and works well. The City of Goleta also set up the *Goleta City Alert* for its residents to notify subscribers by e-mail.

These alerts are not expensive to set up. They guarantee instant messaging, and can be picked up by Internet-capable cell phones as easily as computers. They add to the information being sent out by radio and the press, and insure subscribers receive current information. They could be sent out countywide, or to specific areas which might be affected by the emergency. While the Grand Jury recognizes what the *Independent* and the City of Goleta have done, the County currently does not have such a system.

Reverse 911®

The Sheriff's Communication Center issues Reverse 911® calls. These calls are automated messages from the Sheriff's Department to notify residents about mandatory evacuations or other emergencies. For the residents who received Reverse 911® calls during the two fires, these messages were invaluable. There was no confusion about what they needed to do, and that it had to take place immediately. The Jury was told the Reverse 911® system currently accesses less than 20% of the population and communicates only in English.

The Sheriff's Department recommends that each homeowner have at least one phone which is hooked directly into a phone jack, because some phones will not operate without electricity. Cell phone users may register their phones with the Sheriff's Department (<http://www.sbsheriff.org/>), so they could be notified as well.

CONCLUSION

It is critical to have multiple forms of emergency communication as any one form may not work. Electricity may not be available or earthquake damage might destroy communication towers, but the public still needs to be informed with current, accurate information. Communication may be improved through management, such as the use of a JIC, or may be enhanced through technology, such as better use of radios and improving Reverse 911®. As an additional tool, the EAS can be used to disseminate information more widely to residents.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1a

Contrary to statements by the County CEO and the Office of Emergency Services, there are two radio stations that cover the entire County.

Finding 1b

The County has not established specific airtimes with any radio station to air emergency broadcasts.

Recommendation 1

That the County negotiate a purchase of airtime with a countywide radio station to broadcast emergency messages at specific times.

Finding 2

The County did not activate the Emergency Alert System in either the Gap or Tea Fires to notify the public about mandatory evacuations.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Recommendation 2

That the Office of Emergency Services activate the Emergency Alert System in accordance with the Santa Barbara County Emergency Alert System Plan.

Finding 3

There was no Joint Information Center during the course of the Gap Fire. The Joint Information Center was not set up until 21 hours after the start of the Tea Fire.

Recommendation 3

When an Emergency Operating Center is set up, the Joint Information Center should be activated immediately.

Finding 4

In an emergency, the *Santa Barbara Independent* and the City of Goleta send out e-mail alerts to their subscribers. The County of Santa Barbara has not set up a similar alert system.

Recommendation 4

That the County develop an e-mail alert system which would cover all residents in the County.

Finding 5

The Reverse 911® system can be an effective method of notifying residents. However, it has had limited coverage in the County, communications are limited to English and many homeowners may not receive messages for a variety of reasons.

Recommendation 5a

That the Sheriff's Department inform and educate all County residents about the Reverse 911® system.

Recommendation 5b

That the Sheriff's Department monitor and improve the Reverse 911® system to reach all residents, including those who are Spanish speaking.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

In accordance with *California Penal Code, Section 933.05* each agency and government body affected by or named in this report is requested to respond in writing to the findings and recommendations in a timely manner. The following are the affected agencies for this report, with the mandated response period for each:

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors – 90 days

Finding	1a, 1b
Recommendation	1

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Santa Barbara County Executive Officer – 60 days

Findings 1a, 1b, 2, 3, 4
Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4

Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Services – 60 days

Findings 1a, 1b, 2, 3, 4
Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department – 60 days

Finding 3, 5
Recommendation 3, 5a, 5b

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Emergency Alert System (EAS)

This is a Federal Communication Commission (FCC) mandated program to allow the President of the United States to communicate with the public in a national emergency. However, it has provisions to allow local activation. In Santa Barbara County, the National Weather Service and the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Services (OES) are the primary agencies that can activate the system. City OES offices can access the program through the County OES.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

This is a central command and control facility responsible for carrying out the principles of emergency preparedness and emergency management. An EOC is responsible for the strategic overview of the disaster and to provide logistics support.

Incident Commander

The Incident Commander is responsible for the overall management of an emergency.

Joint Information Center (JIC)

This is a temporary organization established during emergencies to provide response agencies with a means to pool communication resources and ensure that consistent and accurate information is released as quickly as possible to the general public and news media.

Office of Emergency Services (OES)

This office is active year round, not only in emergencies. The Director reports directly to the County CEO. The OES coordinates the overall county response to emergencies. The OES is responsible for alerting and notifying appropriate agencies when a disaster strikes; coordinating all agencies that respond; developing plans and procedures for response to and recovery from disasters; developing and providing preparedness materials for the public.

Public Information Officer (PIO)

PIOs are the communications coordinators of their respective agencies. The County PIO serves as the dissemination point for all media releases within an affected area. He coordinates as necessary to ensure that the public within the affected area receives complete, accurate, timely and consistent information. He also reviews and coordinates all related information releases, and maintains a relationship with media representatives.



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
HONOLULU

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

Recommendations for Improving Public Communications During Emergencies

Presented by the Governor's Comprehensive Communications Review Committee

January 5, 2007
(FINAL REPORT)

INTRODUCTION

Following the October 15, 2006 earthquakes that caused extensive damage on the Big Island and led to widespread power blackouts primarily on O`ahu, Governor Linda Lingle recognized the urgent need to improve emergency communication procedures so residents and visitors receive accurate and timely information from government agencies and the news media during natural disasters and other times of crisis.

To bring this about, the Governor quickly formed the Comprehensive Communications Review Committee, chaired by Lenny Klompus, senior advisor – communications. Co-chairing the committee are two other Cabinet members: Major General Robert Lee, state adjutant general and director of State Civil Defense; and Marsha Wienert, state tourism liaison.

Also serving on the statewide committee are more than 70 government officials from federal, state and county agencies; owners, general managers and publishers from print and broadcast media organizations; representatives from cellular phone providers; and editor and reporters from print, broadcast and Internet media who were “on the ground” gathering information and reporting on the day of the earthquake (see attachment for complete list of members).

At a series of four meetings (one each on Oct. 24 and Oct. 26 and two on Nov. 9), participants engaged in open and honest discussions about the challenges they faced on Oct. 15, and offered suggestions on how they could more efficiently and effectively communicate with the public during future emergencies. This report summarizes those discussions and presents 15 key recommendations for improving the State of Hawai`i's emergency communications plan.

The Governor asked the committee to report back within 60 working days on its findings. The committee co-chairs submitted a preliminary report to the Governor and all committee members for their input and additional recommendations on December 21, 2006. This final report incorporates the committee members' additional comments and recommendations.

Going forward, in the interest of maximizing public safety, it is vital to continue updating the emergency communications plan in response to changing conditions and technological advancements. This will help assure that government agencies and the news media do the best possible job of reaching out to the public during times of crisis with potentially lifesaving information.

OCTOBER 15 EVENTS

A major earthquake struck off the Big Island's Kona coast on Sunday, October 15, 2006 at 7:08 a.m. HST. Within minutes the O'ahu-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Center alerted State Civil Defense (SCD) that no tsunami was generated as a result of the earthquake. This information was received simultaneously by all County Emergency Operations Centers and Warning Points (police departments) over the Hawai'i Area Warning System (HAWAS) voice broadcasting system.

Following are some important developments that took place on Oct. 15, as discussed by committee members:

Official Communications

- At 7:08 a.m., a 6.7 magnitude earthquake occurred in the vicinity of Kiholo Bay, Hawai'i.
- At 7:15 a.m., Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued a Tsunami Information Bulletin for the State of Hawai'i, advising: "NO TSUNAMI IS EXPECTED. REPEAT. NO TSUNAMI IS EXPECTED. HOWEVER, MANY AREAS MAY HAVE EXPERIENCED STRONG SHAKING."
- At 7:20 a.m., Hawai'i County Mayor Harry Kim, as head of the Hawai'i County Civil Defense, contacted KKBG and advised the radio station that there had been an earthquake but no tsunami was generated. KKBG was broadcasting at that time.
- O'ahu Civil Defense Agency (OCDA) attempted to use the Emergency Alert System Live Broadcast Mode to air emergency messages through radio stations operating with backup power. The EAS was not received by the stations. Clear Channel Communications said its system never showed any message from OCDA.
- At 7:57 a.m., State Civil Defense public information officer Ray Lovell contacted KSSK - which had begun live coverage a few minutes earlier when off-duty personnel reached the station - and advised the station's listeners that there had been an earthquake but no tsunami was generated.
- Civil defense sirens were not sounded, as some members of the media and the general public suggested should have occurred. The threshold magnitude to trigger an automatic tsunami warning is 6.9. That threshold was not met on Oct. 15. The larger of the two quakes was 6.7. The sirens are to warn people that a tsunami or other disaster is about to happen. The sirens are not meant to tell the public that something is not going to happen. Sounding the alarm in this case would have created confusion and panic. It is important that civil defense not lose the trust of the people by sounding an alarm when there is no imminent danger.

(more)

- At 9:57 a.m., SCD issued a civil emergency message (CEM) through the emergency alert system asking people to stay off the roads due to traffic lights not working and to use the phones only for emergencies. The high volume of calls in the minutes/hours following the quake jammed telecommunications systems, making it difficult for emergency responders, government officials and the media to communicate.
- Throughout the day, State officials including Governor Lingle, Lt. Governor Aiona, State Transportation Director Rod Haraga, State Tourism Liaison Marsha Wienert, Civil Defense Vice Director Ed Teixeira, and Civil Defense Public Information personnel conducted numerous telephone interviews with radio stations to provide updates on the situation, as well as to relay information from airlines regarding outbound flights.
- A news conference was held at 3:00 p.m. by Governor Lingle and Lt. Governor Aiona, their cabinet, SCD officials and other emergency responders.

Media Communications Disrupted by Power, Phone Outages

- According to a survey conducted by SCD, 80 percent of media stations statewide were off-the-air immediately following the crisis due to a lack of emergency power sources.
- KITV 4 studio facilities remained operational, but their transmitter was down due to lack of power at the transmitter site. KHVO, their transmitter site on Hilo, was the only one that remained up. They were also able to uplink their programming via satellite, allowing their programming to be viewed on the mainland. The KITV Web site had 405,000 page views from the 808 area code that day.
- The KHNL TV 8 was off the air due to no emergency generator at their broadcast tower which is located in the Hilton Hawaiian Village. KFVE 5 television station remained on air the entire day, employing a backup generator at their Palehua transmitter site. The biggest concern was the station's inability to obtain updated information in a timely fashion so viewers could be alerted.
- KHON-TV 2 was off the air on O`ahu, but their neighbor island transmitter sites were up.
- KGMB-TV 9 was off the air because the station does not have a generator.
- Oceanic Time Warner Cable reported that all of its operation centers were active during the emergency. While these centers were operational, TWC/Oceanic customers were unable to receive television, telephone or data service since the infrastructure which powers the TWC/Oceanic signal out to user locations are not backed up with emergency power.
- While two O`ahu television stations were on the air, only those residents who were using external television antennas and televisions powered by batteries or portable generators would be able to receive the programming. All others on O`ahu who view television over cable television could not see the programming due to the power outage.

- LeSEA Broadcasting's (KWHE TV 14) satellite truck was mobilized by NBC, Fox News, and ZDF German TV as early as 8:30 a.m. on the day of the earthquake, providing television feeds to networks/stations outside of Hawai'i.
- There was some confusion regarding Emergency Alert System Local Primary (LP) radio stations and their role and capability to operate during a power outage. On O'ahu, KSSK (LP1) and KRTR (LP2) are the designated stations. They are equipped with emergency backup power. KIPA radio station on the Big Island was still listed as a Local Primary station on the Big Island, despite the fact that it had been off the air due to sale of the station. The plan has been updated to remove KIPA as a Local Primary. Pacific Radio Group's KKBG-FM is now the LP1 for the Big Island. New West Broadcasting Corp.'s KWXX is the official LP2 for the Big Island.
- KKBG-FM on the Big Island announced the earthquake by 7:15 a.m. This was followed by Pacific Radio Group's sister stations in East Hawai'i: KAPA FM (also serves South Point) which went on the air by 7:45 a.m., KPVS-FM by 8:00 a.m., and KHLO-AM by 8:30 a.m.
- Due to loss of electricity, Pacific Radio Group's four West Hawai'i stations (KLEO FM, KAGB FM, KLUA FM and KKON AM) that simulcast its four East Hawai'i stations were not able to get on the air until around 10:00 a.m. Once on the air, the four West Hawai'i stations were manned throughout the day and provided updates about road closures, damages and announcements from Civil Defense.

Note: Since the October 15 earthquake, Pacific Radio Group has installed working generators at its West Hawai'i Kaloko site for three of its FM station transmitters (KAGB, KLEO and KLUA). The company is currently working with the Royal Kona Resort to install a generator at its Kona studios which are located at the Royal Kona Resort.

- New West Broadcasting Corp.'s KWXX, KNWB, and KPUA Hilo were on the air within about 40 minutes of the earthquake but were in contact with Civil Defense within about 10-15 minutes of the event.

Note: New West Broadcasting has contracted and is in the process of installing backup power for its Hilo and Kona transmitters for all four stations (KWXX, KAOY, KNWB, and KPUA).

- On O'ahu, KSSK had a trained operator in the studio who made an announcement about the earthquake at 7:28 a.m. By 7:40 a.m., eight staff people were in the studio and on-air.
- The public affairs officer from the State Department of Defense was sent to KSSK to serve as a liaison; however it was difficult to provide him with updated information via cell phone and the radio station's "hotline" was continually busy.
- COX Radio's six O'ahu stations (KRTR 96.3 FM, KCCN 100.3 FM, KINE 105.1 FM, KPHW 104.3 FM, KRTR 650 AM, and KKNE 940 AM) were on the air intermittently.

Note: Since the earthquake, COX has replaced its KRTR generator at WiliWilnui Ridge with a 25,000 watt Caterpillar generator. Cox has 550 gallons of LP fuel which will last six or seven days.

- Hawai'i Public Radio reported that their station was staffed and was prepared to broadcast, but did not have electric power or phone service.
- On Maui, Pacific Radio Group's KPOA 93.5 aired its first report at 7:25 a.m. Its sister stations, KJKS, KJMD and KLHI, were on air shortly thereafter, with 15 staff members arriving in the offices in Kahului. Pacific Group's two AM stations, KMVI and KNUI, run on separate generators and were also brought on line.
- To serve its Japanese-speaking listeners, KZOO radio station contacted KSSK to convey information. KZOO also broadcasted information to 36 stations in Japan around 10:30 a.m. HST.
- KSSK received calls from bilingual persons who asked to go on-air to deliver messages in various languages. It was difficult for KSSK to verify whether the information was accurate, however, and recommended alerting the international consulates as a source of bilingual speakers.
- Most print and television media posted information about the emergency throughout the day on their Web sites.

Telecommunications

- The ability to communicate was severely hindered by the fact that cellular phone service did not work for many service providers that day. In addition, the high volume of calls stressed wireless phone systems statewide. Wireless push-to-talk service used by State leadership and emergency management personnel remained operational, and generally available.
- Hawaiian Telcom's land-line phone service or plain old telephone service (POTS) was not interrupted. Hawaiian Telcom's locally based Network Operations Center was fully operational, providing uninterrupted management of services and call traffic.
- T-Mobile reported that 59 percent of its network was operational and that the volume of calls was two times larger than normal. Also, the availability of diesel fuel for backup power generators was a concern if the blackout had continued for an extended amount of time.
- Cingular reported that it lost close to 50 percent of its cellular sites, and that if subscribers traveled a mile from their homes, they may have been able to complete their calls.
- Verizon Wireless reported a 250 percent increase in call volume, and noted that many technicians deployed to fix cell sites were stuck in traffic.

Visitor Industry Communications

- For the visitor industry, the biggest challenge was relaying emergency communications via cell phone, when network reliability was marginal at best.
- It was noted that hotels are aware of their responsibility for the safety and well-being of guests during emergencies and therefore have necessary equipment on hand. The hotels have emergency plans, and the majority of them implemented those plans.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on input from committee members, the following key recommendations for improving the emergency communications plan were formulated:

1. Update the State of Hawai'i Emergency Alert System plan which was last updated on March 31, 2004. An interim change has been distributed among emergency managers and the broadcast industry on November 6, 2006. As part of the updating of the plan, the Local Primary stations will be verified on a monthly basis, to ensure they have the ability to broadcast in emergencies.
2. Establish a "media center" or Joint Information Center in the (soon-to-be-acquired) SCD emergency operations center annex in Diamond Head Crater to provide reporters a working area, telephone lines, Internet access, electrical access, and a place to obtain timely information from State and Federal officials.
3. Install dedicated phone lines for various, accredited electronic and print news organizations. The cost of installing these "hard lines" or "red phones" would be covered by the individual broadcasting outlets. The cost could possibly be reduced by using federal funds from the Department of Homeland Security via future grants. In addition, a call-in line or dedicated web access site will be established for media outlets that do not have dedicated phones at emergency operations centers (EOCs).
4. Provide media organizations with updates every 30 minutes or as frequently as possible in person as well as via conference calls and/or video conferences, based on current level of emergency at that half-hour mark. This would improve the flow of information to the public and help refute unsubstantiated rumors and other sources of false information.
5. In order to increase efficiency in disseminating information, a State DOD or SCD public affairs officer will be assigned as a liaison who will be dedicated to the media at any activation of the State EOC. (This will be a function of the soon-to-be-established Joint Information Center in Diamond Head Crater). The public affairs officer's main responsibilities, in conjunction with Governor's Communications Team, will be to respond to media requests for information or interviews; coordinate informational briefings; release information to the media and public; and correct misinformation.

6. Explore the possibility of television and radio stations automatically transmitting approved messages through the Emergency Alert System, as is the case during hazardous weather conditions. Broadcast representatives asked for an EAS code that will activate receivers at broadcast stations for events that are not covered under present codes. SCD, working with the State Emergency Communication Committee and other federal agencies, has assigned a "civil emergency" (CEM) code that will be used for this purpose. This would apply in the case of an earthquake that does not meet the 6.9 magnitude threshold to trigger a tsunami. An EAS would inform the public that an earthquake has struck, but there is no tsunami threat. This was successfully used during the recent earthquake aftershock off the Big Island on Thanksgiving morning November 23, 2006.
7. Establish a dedicated SCD Web site to provide the media with updates online. This would assist media organizations that are unable to send a reporter to SCD or who are unable to use a phone system. To minimize the possibility of islandwide or statewide service disruptions, as was the case on Oct. 15, the Internet server could be located at a site with backup power.
8. In most cases, cell phone text messaging functions were more reliable than regular voice service. The ability to text message emergency alerts to all cell phones was discussed by the committee. The cellular providers agreed to assess the feasibility and technological capability of using the text messaging function for emergencies. The providers are looking into whether this would violate any customer confidentiality policies.
9. Explore the possibility of communicating via electronic message signs on the freeways. The State Department of Transportation Highway's Deputy said it is possible to use the permanent electronic signs. Deploying the portable message signs would require additional logistics that the department would need to look into. Similar signs are located outside of the Aloha Stadium and can also be activated.
10. Increase public awareness about emergency preparedness and what to do in the event of an emergency. In the aftermath of an emergency it is incumbent on individuals, families, businesses, and organizations to have an appropriate preparedness plan. The committee recommended enhancing existing public education campaigns to inform people about how to prepare for various emergencies that could occur in the State of Hawai'i, and what they should do when an emergency happens. Print and broadcast news outlets agreed to participate in this type of public education (PSA) campaign. The education component would also be tied into the monthly emergency broadcast/siren test.
11. Work with the Hawai'i consular corps so they can inform foreign citizens about the nature of the emergency. KZOO (Japanese) and KNDI (all other foreign languages) will broadcast the emergency messages to non-English speaking residents and visitors in the State. KZOO and KNDI will be assisted in their efforts to establish backup power generators.

12. Identify sign language translators and other individuals who can assist in communicating information to individuals who are hearing impaired or have other special needs, including closed captioning capabilities.
13. News outlets requested priority in restoration of power during an outage. While SCD is bringing this to the attention of Hawaiian Electric Company, it should be noted the order of power restoration is based on HECO's plans.
14. News outlets and telecommunications providers requested assistance in obtaining diesel fuel for backup power generators during extended blackout periods. While many of the organizations have generators, the amount of fuel that can be stored is limited due to safety concerns. Transporting the fuel is also a concern. The National Guard also has fueling units that could help restock gasoline supplies where needed. The State Adjutant General will explore this possibility further.
15. Continue convening communications committee meetings on a quarterly or as-needed basis to make additional refinements to the emergency communications plan and track the progress of recommendations 1 thru 14 above. In addition, include the media in an emergency response drill once the recommendations above have been implemented.

CONCLUSION

While the lives of many residents and visitors were temporarily disrupted on Oct. 15, primarily due to widespread loss of electrical power, it is fortunate that no deaths or serious injuries occurred as a result of the earthquakes. That said, the emergency situation that occurred served as an urgent wake-up call to government agencies, the news media, telecommunications providers and electric company that the current emergency communications system can be improved.

The present Emergency Alert System was instituted in 1996, and the State's Emergency Satellite Communications System became operational in 1998. EOC telephone conferencing systems were installed and upgraded in 1998 and 2001, respectively. The State Video Conference network was established in 2004 and is currently being upgraded to provide for additional users to be included in the conference. In 2005, State Civil Defense established a Virtual Joint Information System using a web-based PC video collaboration tool connecting to county EOCs, the Governor's and Mayors' communications officers, the Department of Health, Department of Land and Natural Resources, and the National Guard Joint Operations Center. In 2006, KU Band satellite systems have been purchased to improve emergency communications on a mobile van and the State EOC. This capability is currently being tested.

Looking ahead, SCD will continue to work closely with federal officials in improving the State Emergency Plan, taking into account lessons learned from major disasters in other parts of the country. It is the committee's desire to improve communications beyond the traditional communications methods to include multiple non-traditional communications means to disseminate information.