



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: County Executive
Office
Department No.: 012
For Agenda Of: September 7, 2010
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Tme: 10 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department Michael F. Brown, County Executive Officer, 568-3404
Director(s)
Contact Info: Terri Nisich, Assistant CEO, 568-3400 

SUBJECT: Grand Jury Report "Santa Barbara County Reverse 911@Is Anybody Home?"

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions: That the Board of Supervisors:

- A. Consider and Adopt responses in Attachment (3) as the Board of Supervisors' responses to the Grand Jury report entitled "Santa Barbara County Reverse 911@ - Is Anybody Home?" and
- B. Authorize the Chair to sign the letter included as Attachment (3) forwarding the responses to the Presiding Judge.

Summary Text:

On May 20, 2010 the Civil Grand Jury released a report entitled "Santa Santa Barbara County Reverse 911@ - Is Anybody Home?" The Board of Supervisors is named as a responder to Findings 1a, 1b, and 2, and Recommendations 1 and 2. The Sheriff's Department was also requested to respond to Findings 1a, 1b, and 2, and Recommendations 1 and 2.

It is recommended that the Board agree with Findings 1a and 1b, partially agree with Finding 2, and indicate that both Recommendations 1 and 2 will be implemented. All responses are provided in the letter to the Presiding Judge. (Attached)

Background:

The Grand Jury report examines the Santa Barbara County Reverse 911® program. The report outlines concerns by the Grand Jury that: (1) a relatively low percentage of household were actually being contacted during any emergency where the Reverse 911® system was implemented, and (2) messages sent were limited to English. The Jury interviewed personnel from the Sheriff’s Department responsible for emergency planning, visited the Regional Emergency Communication Center, and interviewed other emergency response staff. The Jury also viewed a demonstration of the electronic mapping system that locates all registered telephone numbers on a county map.

Performance Measure:

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: No **Fiscal Analysis:**

<u>Funding Sources</u>	<u>Current FY Cost:</u>	<u>Annualized On-going Cost:</u>	<u>Total One-Time Project Cost</u>
General Fund			
State			
Federal			
Fees			
Other:			
Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

Narrative:

Staffing Impacts:

Legal Positions:

FTEs:

Special Instructions:

Attachments:

1. Grand Jury Report entitled “Santa Barbara County Reverse 911®Is Anybody Home?”
2. Sheriff Department’s response to Grand Jury Report entitled “Santa Barbara County Reverse 911®Is Anybody Home?”
3. Letter to the Presiding Judge with Board of Supervisors Responses

Authored by:

Terri Nisich, Assistant County Executive Officer

cc:

Sheriff Bill Brown

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY REVERSE 911®

Is Anybody Home?

SUMMARY

The 2008-09 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury report on the county's emergency communications system included findings and recommendations regarding the Reverse 911® system operated by the Sheriff's Emergency Communications Center. The findings dealt with the limited coverage of the system, English only communications and messages not being received by all who were contacted. The recommendations included: (1) informing and educating the residents of the county on the existence of the Reverse 911® system; and (2) that the system reach all residences, including those with occupants who are Spanish speaking only.

The Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff's Department responded to that 2008-09 report stating that educational programs were ongoing, that improvements to the Reverse 911® system were being made, and that Spanish language messaging was being planned.

The 2009-10 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury (Jury) found that progress was made since publication of the 2008-09 Jury report. The relatively low number of answered Reverse 911® calls is augmented by the use of many additional tools available and utilized during an emergency. However, dual language capability is yet to be fully integrated into the system. Messages in English and Spanish are sent to targeted areas only, leaving dispersed pockets of Spanish speakers with English only messages. The new on-line registration form is only in English, and elements are confusing.

BACKGROUND

The 2009-10 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury (Jury) is concerned that: (1) a relatively low percentage of households were actually being contacted during any emergency where the Reverse 911® system was implemented, and (2) messages sent were limited to English. The Jury interviewed personnel from the Sheriff's Department (Sheriff) responsible for emergency planning, visited the Regional Emergency Communication Center and interviewed other emergency response staff. The Jury also viewed a demonstration of the electronic mapping system that locates all registered telephone numbers on a county map.

GETTING THE MESSAGE THROUGH

On average, landline calls related to the five most recent incidents including the Gap, Tea and Jesusita Fires break down as follows:¹

- 19% were answered
- 30% were answered by machines
- 49% were unanswered, busy or timed out
- 1% went to businesses or fax machines
- 2% were no longer in service
- 1% were disconnected before completed

Emergency contacts can be limited due to power outages which disable cordless telephones, as happened during the Tea Fire and cellular and landline telephone systems can fail due to overloading. Ventura County, which utilizes a similar reverse 911 system, reaches 54.3% of households (answered or picked up by an answering machine or voicemail).² If the same criteria are used for Santa Barbara County 49% of households could be reached.³

Reverse 911® is not a panacea in case of emergencies. It is only one of a number of important tools that can be used during any emergency. The Sheriff utilizes the media (radio and television, both of which may interrupt scheduled programming for emergency information), print media, internet websites, internet-enabled devices, public information officers (PIOs), door to door notification, and announcements from patrol cars to inform the public of unfolding emergencies.

To supplement the Sheriff's efforts at emergency notification, the County Office of Emergency Services runs temporary information centers located in affected neighborhoods. In an attempt to keep people who answer a Reverse 911® from hanging up, the message and caller ID now indicates "Sheriff's Alert."

Telephone numbers used for the system come from either landlines or cellular telephones. The Sheriff contracts with Verizon for all 480,000 landlines within the county. Of the total county landlines, there are 3,500 changes weekly. Cell phones are registered on the Sheriff's website at <http://www.sbsheriff.org/reverse911a.html> or by calling the Sheriff's Department. About 20,000 cell phone numbers were registered during the Gap and Tea fires and almost 10,000 additional cell phones were added subsequent to the Jesusita fire.

¹ Total exceeds 100% due to rounding

² Based on 52 activations of the Ventura system.

³ The causes of unsuccessful calls are similar for both counties.

The Sheriff's Department has the ability and equipment to handle most emergency communication needs. However, if an emergency occurs which taxes the existing system, the department may employ a remote hosted site located in North Carolina, which could reach an unlimited number of households in the county.

With a grant from the Orfalea Foundation, the capacity of the Reverse 911® system has been significantly increased. The number of outgoing telephone lines expanded from 28 to 46, thereby increasing the number of possible calls per hour from 1500 to 2500. If necessary, a "mass call feature" could be employed with the ability to make 4000 calls per hour. The grant also included funding for five years of maintenance costs.

The Reverse 911® system employs electronic mapping, which allows for targeting specific geographical areas for contact and automatically dials all numbers in the designated area. The Jury viewed a demonstration of the remote computer-based mapping system at the Emergency Communications Center and witnessed the accuracy and precision by which individual telephone numbers are matched to geographic areas for quick communication. The Jury also previewed a new on-line registration portal by which county residents can register their landline and cellular telephones and locate their telephone number on a map.

DUAL LANGUAGE CAPABILITY

Emergency alerts are sent out in English and Spanish when the Sheriff determines the targeted area is one with a high percentage of Spanish only speakers. While the Jury questions the effectiveness of this method—Spanish speakers are dispersed throughout the county—the Jury was informed that other counties in the country with demographics similar to Santa Barbara utilize this method as the best now available.⁴

The Sheriff informed the Jury that a second-generation emergency alert system will be available in the near future which will have multiple language capability. Presently however, sending telephone messages that utilize electronic translation technology is found to be unreliable. The Jury was also informed that pressing one button for English and another button for Spanish is slow to set-up and often difficult to translate accurately during an emergency.

Although the Sheriff informed the Jury that on-line registration in Spanish is an option on the current web site, the Jury found only an explanatory paragraph, not the registration form, in Spanish. The Sheriff informed the Jury this oversight will be corrected and the registration process will be simplified.

⁴ Ventura and San Luis Obispo, California; City of San Antonio, Texas.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1a

The Sheriff's Department Reverse 911® system accesses all landlines in the county and in the three most recent county fire emergencies, the system reached 49% of affected households.

Finding 1b

The Sheriff's Department established an English only on-line registration form for landlines, cellular telephones and Internet access,

Recommendation 1

The Sheriff's Department revise the entire on-line registration process to allow use in both English and Spanish.

Finding 2

The Sheriff's Department Reverse 911® system currently sends emergency messages in both English and Spanish only to those areas they believe have a high concentration of Spanish speakers.

Recommendation 2

The Sheriff's Department implement a Reverse 911® emergency message system that alerts all residents of the county in both English and Spanish.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

In accordance with *Section 933.05 of the California Penal Code*, 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:

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department – 60 days

Findings 1a, 1b, 2
Recommendations 1, 2

The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors – 90 days

Findings 1a, 1b, 2
Recommendations 1, 2

SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT RESPONSE
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY GRAND JURY'S 2009-2010 REPORT
"SANTA BARBARA COUNTY REVERSE 911®
Is Anybody Home"

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1a: *The Sheriff's Department Reverse 911® system accesses all landlines in the county and in the three most recent county fire emergencies, the system reached 49% of affected households.*

Response to Finding 1a: **The Sheriff's Department agrees with this finding.**

Finding 1b: *The Sheriff's Department established an English only on-line registration form for landlines, cellular telephones and internet access.*

Response to Finding 1b: **The Sheriff's Department agrees with this finding.**

Recommendation 1: *The Sheriff's Department revise the entire on-line registration process to allow use in both English and Spanish.*

Response to Recommendation 1: **The Sheriff's Department is actively working with Plant CML, the parent company of Reverse 911® to modify the "self registration portal" to include Spanish as well as English language during the registration process. Plant CML has assured us the Spanish language will be available in the next version of the "self registration portal".**

Finding 2: *The Sheriff's Department Reverse 911® system currently sends emergency messages in both English and Spanish only to those areas they believe have a high concentration of Spanish speakers.*

Response to Finding 2: **The Sheriff's Department agrees in part with this finding and disagrees in part with this finding.**

Recommendation 2: *The Sheriff's Department implement a Reverse 911® emergency message system that alerts all residents of the county in both English and Spanish.*

Response to Recommendation 2: **The Sheriff's Department continues to work with Plant CML, the parent company of Reverse 911® to program a method wherein the calling party may select a message in either Spanish or English when they receive an incoming emergency notification phone call from the Reverse 911® system. The technology exists for persons to select a language when they make a phone call into an automated phone system. Unfortunately, when a person receives a phone call from an automated message machine, that option to select another language is not usually available. Plant CML recognizes this deficiency in the system and has advised us of two different workarounds.**

The first would be to record the message in both English and Spanish and at the beginning of the message advise the recipient in Spanish that they need to listen through the English message for the Spanish message. Providing the information will at least double the time that it takes for an emergency notification message to be broadcast.

PlantCML engineers have suggested that our Communications Dispatchers use an existing feature for making English / Spanish emergency notifications through their system. Reverse 911® has a survey feature that will allow the recipient to press 1 for a notification in English or 2 for a notification in Spanish. Separate messages may then be recorded for the corresponding language. The down side to use of this “survey” feature will be an increase in the message size, thereby increasing the amount of time that the emergency message will take to broadcast. It is the intention of the Sheriff’s Department to try this workaround in any future usage of the system, until Plant CML enhances their product to include an easy to use English / Spanish interface, or it is determined that continued use of the “survey” causes a detriment to public safety.

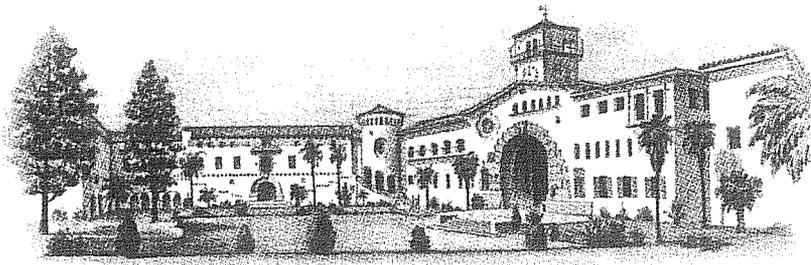
SALUD CARBAJAL
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Second District, Chair

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Third District

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Fourth District, Vice Chair

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Fifth District



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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105 East Anapamu Street

Santa Barbara, CA 93101

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September 7, 2010

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

Honorable Judge Arthur A. Garcia
Santa Barbara County Superior Court
312 C. East Cook Street
Santa Maria, CA 93456-5369

**Board of Supervisors' responses to Fiscal Year 2009-2010
Grand Jury Report on "Santa Barbara County Reverse 911®-Is Anybody Home?"**

Dear Judge Garcia:

During its regular meeting of September 7, 2010, the Board of Supervisors adopted the following as the Board's response to the findings and recommendations in the Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Grand Jury Report entitled "Santa Barbara County Reverse 911®-Is Anybody Home?"

The Board of Supervisors thanks the Grand Jury for its work on this most important issue regarding the county's emergency communications system. The County Supervisors have carefully reviewed the findings and recommendations presented in the Grand Jury Report and provide the following responses:

Finding 1a

The Sheriff's Department Reverse 911® system accesses all landlines in the county and in the three most recent county fire emergencies, the system reached 49% of affected households.

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

Finding 1b

The Sheriff's Department established an English only on-line registration form for landlines, cellular telephones and internet access.

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

Recommendation 1

The Sheriff's Department revise the entire on-line registration process to allow use in both English and Spanish.

Response: This recommendation is currently being implemented by the Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Department is actively working with Plant CML, the parent company of Reverse 911® to modify the "self registration portal" to include Spanish as well as English language during the registration process. Plant CML has assured us the Spanish language will be available in the next version of the "self registration portal."

Finding 2

The Sheriff's Department Reverse 911® system currently sends emergency messages in both English and Spanish only to those areas they believe have a high concentration of Spanish speakers.

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding. During a particular emergency situation, the Sheriff's Department assesses whether the impacted area has a high concentration of Spanish speakers. If it is determined that the area likely does have a high concentration of Spanish speakers, then the emergency message is sent out in both English and Spanish. If it is determined that the area likely does not have a high concentration of Spanish speakers, then the emergency message is sent out in English only.

Recommendation 2

The Sheriff's Department implement a Reverse 911® emergency message system that alerts all residents of the county in both English and Spanish.

Response: This recommendation will be implemented by the Sheriff's Department. There is currently no ideal method of sending out a message in both English and Spanish available through the system. However, PlantCML has suggested the use of an existing feature for making English / Spanish emergency notifications through their system, which will be used the next time the system is activated. Reverse 911® has a survey feature that will allow the recipient to press 1 for a notification in English or 2 for a notification in Spanish. Separate messages may then be recorded for the corresponding language. The down side to use of this "survey" feature will be an increase in the message size, thereby increasing the amount of time that the emergency message will take to broadcast. It is the intention of the Sheriff's Department to activate this feature during any future usage of the system, until Plant CML enhances their product to include an easy to use English / Spanish interface, or it is determined that continued use of the "survey" causes a detriment to public safety.

Thank you once again for your report. If I can be of any further assistance, please contact my office at any time.

Sincerely,

Janet Wolf
Chair, Board of Supervisors

cc: Fletcher Phillips, Foreman-SB County Civil Grand Jury 2009-10