

Office of the Sheriff



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

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Sheriff - Coroner Office
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July 31, 2024

BILL BROWN

Sheriff - Coroner

CRAIG BONNER

Undersheriff

Eva Macias
Foreman, SBC Grand Jury
Santa Barbara County Courthouse
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
emacias@sbcourts.org

Re: Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report Entitled "*Homeless Encampments in Santa Barbara County – Becoming Part of the Community Again*"

Dear Foreperson Macias,

Enclosed is the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office response to the 2023 – 2024 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report entitled "*Homeless Encampments in Santa Barbara County – Becoming Part of the Community Again.*"

As requested in the report, the Sheriff's Office responds to Findings 7, and Recommendations 7a and 7b.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at (805) 681-4290.

Sincerely,



BILL BROWN
Sheriff-Coroner

Enclosure: The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office response to the 2023 – 2024 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report entitled "*Homeless Encampments in Santa Barbara County – Becoming Part of the Community Again.*"

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office
Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury 2023-2024 Report
"Homeless Encampments in Santa Barbara County – Becoming Part of the Community Again"

Findings and Recommendations

Santa Barbara County Sheriff: 60 Days

Finding(s): 7

Recommendation(s): 7a, 7b

FINDING 7

When heavy rain is forecast and materializes, the persons in encampments along creeks and riverbeds are at high risk for loss of life, personal property, and living quarters.

Sheriff's Office Response:

Agree.

The Sheriff's Office understands the dangers that our unpredictable weather can cause for our vulnerable populations, including those within homeless encampments. We work closely and meet regularly with the Santa Barbara County Community Services Department (CSD) who maintains and shares a comprehensive database of encampment locations throughout the county. This helps us, Santa Barbara County Departments, city agencies, and our emergency response partners, including the Office of Emergency Management and CSD, to identify encampments that could be affected before and during severe storm events.

Recommendation 7a

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and the Office of Emergency Management, using mapping technology, shall continue to refine and share comprehensive locations of encampment sites among all concerned agencies.

Sheriff's Office Response:

Has been implemented, with a summary of the implementation actions taken.

Santa Barbara County Community Service Department has already implemented and maintained geographic information system (GIS) mapping technology and shares the comprehensive locations of encampment sites with the Sheriff's Office and all other partner agencies. We utilize this data for situational awareness and data-driven decision-making when severe storm events could impact these areas. CSD has been using an Extreme Weather Response Protocol specific to persons experiencing homelessness since 2023.

Recommendation 7b

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and the Office of Emergency Management shall develop and formalize a multi-modal warning system to relocate persons when there are looming credible threats.

Sheriff's Office Response:

Has been implemented, with a summary of the implementation actions taken.

In early 2023, the Santa Barbara County Community Service Department Encampment Response Coordinator, in partnership with the Office of Emergency Management and other agencies, developed an "Extreme Weather Response Protocol" specific to unhoused and homeless populations, which has been

implemented during several heavy rain events. Before severe storm events, the Sheriff's Office works with the Office of Emergency Management and CSD, and city agencies, in a multi-modal warning system to alert our vulnerable populations in our local homeless encampments. This multi-modal system includes:

- Signage—Signs in English and Spanish instruct people to leave known entry and exit areas to riverbeds and creeks.
- County ReadySBC Alerts and Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) – Before and during severe weather events, the Sheriff's Office and the Office of Emergency Management utilize the County's mass notification system ReadySBC Alerts to notify the community of incoming hazards and any protective actions necessary to stay safe, including evacuations. People who register for alerts through the County's emergency information website, www.ReadySBC.org, can list up to 5 addresses within the County and multiple delivery methods. The system can alert through text messages, phone calls, emails, and TTY/TDD for the deaf and hard of hearing. The Sheriff's Office and the Office of Emergency Management have also been granted access to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system, which transmits emergency messages via cell towers to geographically targeted areas. WEAs feature a unique sound and vibration, are sent in English and Spanish, and can reach individuals with a cell phone in the targeted area, regardless of whether they are registered. Depending on the severity and urgency of the emergency, the County can utilize some or all of these alerting tools to reach as many individuals as possible.
- Flyovers—Using the Santa Barbara County Community Services Department data, the Santa Barbara County Air Support Unit conducts flyover loudspeaker evacuation announcements over homeless encampments.
- In-person contact—In the days before extreme weather arrives, outreach workers go to known sites to notify people living in encampments. They provide information on warming centers and warnings to leave waterways.
- ReadySBC.org and Joint Information Center (JIC) Public Information – Severe weather information is posted to the County's emergency information website, www.ReadySBC.org, in English and Spanish. This information emphasizes the dangers of flood waters, avoiding rivers, creeks, streams, and other low-lying and flood-prone locations, and when evacuations are issued, evacuation sheltering locations and other resources. When activated, the Joint Information Center (located within the County's Emergency Operations Center) maintains website information throughout the severe weather event and through various communication methods, including press releases, social media, email blasts, and interactive maps.

As with any resident, there is no way to force someone to relocate. The Extreme Weather Protocol, with its multi-modal warning system, is meant to encourage, and assist with, re-location during heavy rain events.