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Emergency Preparedness Of Yuba County

Summary:

During the 2011-2012 fiscal years, the Yuba County Grand Jury conducted an investigation and published a report entitled “History of Flood and Flames - Emergency Preparedness of Yuba County”. The Yuba County Office of Emergency Services, along with the incorporated cities of Wheatland and Marysville were the subjects of the report. While the investigation and subsequent report gave credit to the County Office of Emergency Services (OES) management for being well-prepared for a major event, it also revealed that there were significant deficiencies with the City of Marysville’s compliance with California Emergency Administration (CalEMA) requirements and Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) National Incident Management System (NIMS). This report shall serve in part, as a continuity check on the findings of the previous report, but will also outline the ongoing efforts to maintain/improve emergency preparedness within the county and the incorporated cities within.

Introduction and Background:

Yuba County with its varying terrain ranging from 35 feet to over 4800 feet above sea level and its geographic location is subject to any number of natural or human caused disasters. Two major rivers and the associated levee system protecting the valley floor from flooding have and always will be a major focus for emergency preparedness. Major flood events in 1986 and 1997 caused significant economic and property damage to the unincorporated areas of Linda, Olivehurst, and Plumas Lakes when sections of levee failed respectively on the Yuba and Feather Rivers. Ongoing improvements to Yuba County’s levee system will hopefully reduce the likelihood of future flooding, but can never completely eliminate the threat. Increasing population densities in these flood prone areas only add to the importance of emergency preparedness.

Equally important is the disaster threat from fire in Yuba County as evidenced by the 1997 Williams fire and the 1999 Pendola fire. The 2011-2012 Grand Jury reported that these two fires burned thousands of acres destroying homes, buildings, and vehicles which displaced thousands of people, pets and livestock; and cost the county taxpayers more than six million dollars.

Emergency management and response is the primary function of the County OES. Disaster events may have similarities; however, they will never be exactly the same. Continuous changes in technology and “lessons learned” from prior events mandate frequent and consistent training are performed. This training will ensure all emergency responders are up to date on the most current policies and procedures and that costly and potentially fatal flaws are minimized.

Methodology and Approach:

Members of the Grand Jury reviewed the 2011-2012 Grand Jury report; toured the Yuba County Office of Emergency Services facilities; observed a multi-agency slow rise flood training exercise, and conducted multiple interviews with:

- Emergency Operations Manager and staff
- Marysville City Manager
- Marysville Chief of Police
- Yuba County Administrative Officer

Documents:

- <http://yubacourts.org/divisions/grandjury/reports>
- www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/OES/
- *U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2013). Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office*

Discussion and Narrative:

The charge of the Grand Jury is to review, and if deemed necessary, conduct a continuity check on prior years' Grand Jury findings and recommendations. Continuity is defined as "an uninterrupted flow; a coherent whole and uninterrupted connection; unbroken succession; close union of parts" (Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary).

The 2011-2012 Grand Jury conducted an investigation into the emergency preparedness of Yuba County and the incorporated cities within. That investigation disclosed many positives to that preparedness effort; however, there were some deficiencies in need of attention. Those findings in the "Flood and Flames – Emergency Preparedness of Yuba County" report were as follows:

(<http://yubacourts.org/divisions/grandjury/reports>)

Prior Findings from 2011-2012 Final Report:

- F-1. The Office of Emergency Services Manager has made good use of available grant monies to create a center that is cost effective, organized and user friendly.*
- F-2. The City of Wheatland is NIMS compliant.*
- F-3. The City of Marysville is not NIMS compliant.*
- F-4. The City of Wheatland has adopted the OES Emergency Operations Plan.*

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- F-5. *The City of Marysville does not have a qualified emergency operations plan.*
- F-6. *The City of Marysville does not have an emergency management plan that coordinates emergency response among other organizations.*
- F-7. *The Marysville Chief of Police has failed to take advantage of offers from the OES to assist in achieving a compliant emergency operations plan.*

Prior Recommendations from 2011-2012 Final Report:

- R-1. *The City of Marysville should complete an emergency operations plan, which is Cal EMA qualified or adopt the OES Emergency Operations Plan.*
- R-2. *The City of Marysville should consider the negative effects on the community by its apparent unwillingness to work with other emergency responders and other appropriate agencies.*
- R-3. *The City of Marysville should take advantage of the certified, no-cost training provided by the OES.*

Request for Responses to 2011-2012 Final Report:

Consistent with California Penal Code §933.5 the Grand Jury requested responses to the aforementioned findings and recommendations from the City of Marysville Chief of Police and Mayor on Findings F-3, F5-7, R1-3. The Chief of Police formally responded to the Grand Jury by letter dated August 1, 2012. He was in agreement with the Grand Jury finding (F-3), but was in disagreement on all of the remaining findings and recommendations. The Chief of Police responded to the Grand Jury by stating in part that:

“After reviewing the document produced by the members of the Grand Jury our response is that we disagree with the findings and recommendations made. Furthermore, the summary, discussion, findings and recommendations sections of this report are, in our opinion, erroneous and misleading. It is the intention of the City to continue with its process of preparing for emergencies and we are making great strides in this area.”

The 2012-2013 Grand Jury received, as part of the response from the Chief of Police, a City Resolution No. 2010-34 which does adopt the County of Yuba’s operational area emergency operations plan.

The Mayor of Marysville provided no response until the subsequent 2012-2013 Grand Jury called it to his attention that he was required by Penal Code § 933.5 to respond. In his response letter to the Superior Court dated October 6, 2012, he stated he would only “...adopt the Police Chief’s written report as his written response...” to the Grand Jury. Members of the current Grand Jury determined that the City of Marysville was less than cooperative in responding to the concerns presented in the 2012-2013 Grand Jury report.

2014-2015 Grand Jury

Members of the 2014-2015 Grand Jury began this investigation by touring the County Office of Emergency Services in Marysville and then interviewing the Emergency Operations Manager and Emergency Operations Planner. It should be noted that when the 2011-2012 report was published, there was only one full time employee in OES; the Operations Manager. In early 2014, a full time Emergency Operations Planner position was filled. The OES manager reported this new position has been a great benefit in balancing the workload and enhancing the office’s ability to provide necessary on-going management and response training. The Grand Jury members requested and received, on compact disk, a copy of the “County of Yuba Emergency Operations Plan”. The current document is in draft form and represents an updated revision to the previously approved 2008 management plan.

During the initial interview with the OES manager, he indicated that his office would be conducting a multi-jurisdictional slow rise flood training exercise titled Operation Slow Rise. Several Grand Jury members requested and were given permission to observe a portion of the training exercise held on October 13, 2014. This training and exercise program is quite extensive in nature and included coordination with 23 outside organizations throughout the region and participation by 86 Yuba County employees. The County of Yuba utilizes the US Department of Homeland Security’s Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) to conduct all exercise activities. HSEEP provides a set of guiding principles for exercise programs. It is a common approach to exercise program management, design and development, conduct, evaluation, and improvement planning. (Ref: *U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2013). Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.*)

Planning for Operation Slow Rise began by assembling a planning team consisting of representatives from many jurisdictions, functional areas, and disciplines. More than 20 local, state, and federal entities participated. Planning and coordination meetings were held over a six month period which culminated in the exercise held on October 23, 2014. The objective of the exercise was to evaluate the effectiveness of plans and procedures, operating environments, and the achievement of desired outcomes. The OES staff selected five objectives:

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- Evaluate the activation and execution of the County Emergency Operations Plan and Annexes:
 - Annex K: Slow-Rise Flood Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
 - Annex E: Evacuation SOP
 - Annex L: Tactical Interoperability Communication Plan (TCIP)
- Evaluate the functionality of the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
- Evaluate the ability of the EOC Management Team to develop and complete an Action Plan
- Evaluate the ability of the EOC Management Team to conduct a shift change
- Test radio communications between County entities and the Reclamation Districts

To develop a realistic and challenging scenario, the Yuba County OES partnered with the National Weather Service to create a series of weather reports, river level stages and river graphics based on historical data from prior events. The primary intent of the exercise was to bring observed river levels to specific heights in order to activate the stages within Annex K: Slow Rise Flood Standard Operating Procedure. Participants in the exercise were given the weather forecast and allowed time to analyze the forecast and take appropriate steps to respond as needed.

Post evaluation of the exercise identified a number of strengths as well as some areas where improvements could be made. The Grand Jury recognizes the value of this scale of exercise as an important tool to ensure the citizens of Yuba County are protected during an emergency in a professional well-organized manner.

The City of Wheatland and the City of Marysville have adopted the County's Emergency Operations Plan and utilized the operations procedures and checklists during the most recent exercise. Additionally, the City of Marysville has developed its own Multi-Hazard Plan. The Grand Jury questioned the need for a separate plan and expressed concerns of potential conflicts. The OES manager emphasized that the City plan, while not mandatory from the County, State, or Federal perspective, would serve as an over-view document for City staff. The City plan could be helpful for situations that do not necessarily escalate to the level of County OES involvement. The City Multi-Hazard Plan's final draft is currently under review by City management. It has not been reviewed by the County OES manager, nor formally adopted by the Marysville City Council. The Multi-Hazard plan should be reviewed by the OES manager so as to ensure consistency with the County Emergency Operations Plan.

Marysville has a new City Manager, Mayor, and Chief of Police and much has been accomplished in rectifying non-compliance issues. Marysville City staff has been actively working with the County OES and is now well within acceptable levels of compliance. OES staff stated both the City of Wheatland and the City of Marysville worked proactively with County OES during the recent training and evaluation exercise.

The 2014-2015 Grand Jury is pleased with the level of commitment shown by all of the local agencies and the attention given to preparedness for a disaster. The County EOC is well-organized and well-equipped. The location of the Office of Emergency Services, however, is a concern. The operations center is located in the County Government Center in downtown Marysville, adjacent to the 10th Street Bridge. While convenient for assembling County emergency operations staff, it is adjacent to an active railroad track, inter-regional State Highway 20, and within the confines of the Marysville levee system. The OES does have a fully operational mobile unit located off site, and a secondary emergency operations center located well above any potential flood zone. Careful consideration should be given to move the OES operations center to a location with less potential for disruption during a flood or major transportation event.

Findings:

- F1. In October, 2014, current Grand Jury members observed a portion of the Operation Slow Rise training exercise. The Office of Emergency Services (OES) operates in a proactive, professional, and well-organized fashion. OES leads the effort in coordinating emergency responses in Yuba County; whether it is flood, fire, traffic, rail, chemical, or any other like disaster.
(www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/OES/)
- F2. The City of Marysville does not have an approved Multi-Hazard Plan. The city's draft of the Multi-Hazard Plan has been submitted to the City Manager's office for review and will be subsequently submitted to the Marysville City Council for adoption.
- F3. The Emergency Operations Center located at the County Government Center, (915 8th Street, Marysville, CA) is convenient for training given the number of county employees that participate in the training exercises. However, its physical location is at-risk due to its close proximity to an active railroad line, inter-regional State Highway 20, and within the confines of the Marysville levee system.
- F4. The City of Marysville has made significant progress in addressing the concerns of the 2011-2012 Grand Jury. City Management has been open to discussions with the current Grand Jury and the Yuba County OES. City Management has made significant progress in addressing previous non-compliance issues.

Recommendations:

- R1. The County Office of Emergency Services should continue with their proactive, professional, and well-organized approach to training and coordination of emergency service activities. (See F1)
- R2. The Marysville City Council complete and formally adopt their Multi-Hazard Plan and continue working proactively with the County Office of Emergency Services. (See F2)
- R3. The Yuba County OES and the Board of Supervisors give careful consideration to relocating the Emergency Operations Center to a location with less exposure to disruptions impacting the ability to respond to a disastrous event, should one occur, on the adjacent railroad line, State Highway 20, or breach in the Marysville levee system. (See F3)

Commendation:

- C1. The Grand Jury appreciates the hard work and focus of the Yuba County OES and the City of Marysville and acknowledges their emphasis on the wellbeing and safety of the citizenry of Yuba County in the event of a natural disaster or other life threatening emergency. The Grand Jury appreciates and recognizes the positive attitude, outlook, and openness of the Marysville City Manager and the Chief of Police.

Request for Responses:

Pursuant to Penal Code §933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

From the following governing bodies:

- County Administrator (F3, R3)
- OES Manager (F3, R3)
- City Manager, City of Marysville (F2, F4, R2)
- Chairman, Yuba County Board of Supervisors (F1, F3, R1, R3)

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted in accordance with Penal Code §933(c) and subject to the notice, agenda, and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.