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HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES FIELD WORKER SAFETY

SUMMARY

While only ten Yuba County Health and Human Services (HHS) field workers reported injuries over the past five years, the potential for danger is always there whenever in-home visits are conducted. These dangers include overly protective or aggressive dogs, unsafe homes, communicable diseases and the possibility of attack by clients or other persons in the home.

HHS field workers make hundreds of in-home visits each month in a wide variety of circumstances. Their primary concerns are dogs, unexpected or unknown persons in the home and poor cell phone communication while in the foothills.

HHS has well-established, written policies and procedures for field worker safety. However, none of the field workers interviewed said they knew about the written policies or had received any safety training subsequent to their initial training. However, they were aware of safety precautions due to verbal reminders provided by the Dispatch Center personnel.

While the chance of HHS field workers being injured is unlikely, it is important that all steps be taken to ensure their safety.

The Grand Jury recommends that HHS field workers receive annual safety training. The Grand Jury also recommends that HHS investigate the possibility of field workers being provided some type of safety equipment while in the field.

BACKGROUND

HHS is one of the county's largest departments with close to 300 personnel. Approximately 200 are assigned as field workers from five divisions: CalWorks, Adult Services, Children's Services, Employment Services and Public Health.

Among the dangers facing the HHS field workers, while conducting in-home visits, are the possibility of communicable disease transmission, overly protective or aggressive dogs, unsafe homes and the possibility of attack by clients or other persons in the home.

Members of the Grand Jury conducted an inquiry to determine if HHS is providing adequate safety training pertaining to in-home visits by its field workers.

APPROACH

Members of the Grand Jury interviewed senior HHS personnel and asked them to provide a list of all reported injuries by HHS field workers over the past five years.

The members of the Grand Jury also interviewed six randomly-selected HHS personnel, whose duties include field work, to determine their experiences during in-home visits. Specifically, the field workers were asked the following questions:

- Have you ever been injured during an in-home visit?
- How did HHS respond to the incident?
- Are you aware of the HHS policies and procedures as they pertain to your personal safety?
- Does HHS provide any type of safety training on in-home visits?

Included in this inquiry was a review of all HHS policies and procedures as they pertain to in-home visits.

DISCUSSION

During the interview with the senior HHS personnel, the Grand Jury members learned HHS has approximately 200 persons, from five different divisions, making in-home visits: CalWorks, Adult Services, Children's Services, Employment Services and Public Health. The senior department personnel commented on the high volume of work and the large number of clients that HHS is responsible for.

In response to a request from the Grand Jury Members, HHS provided a list of all injuries suffered by field workers, during in-home visits, over the last five years.

It was learned that, between 2007 and November 2011, ten field workers reported injuries. These injuries included dog bites and scratches, insect bites, slipping on snow, cigarette smoke exposure and a twisted ankle. Additionally, one field worker was "injured by [a] parent driving erratically while attempting to prevent the social worker from speaking to [a] child." The most common injuries were dog-caused: one scratched and three bitten.

Grand Jury members interviewed six randomly-selected HHS personnel whose duties include in-home visits. The interviews were limited to six because of the similarity of answers from each of those persons. Five of the six had extensive experience; one had been on the job for approximately a year.

The Grand Jury learned HHS field workers had three main areas of concern about their field work: poor cell phone communication while in the foothill areas, overly protective or aggressive animals, and unknown or unexpected persons in the home.

Of the six field workers interviewed, three said dogs were always a concern. Two other field workers were injured while running, one while being chased by a horse, and one after being threatened by a person with a knife.

All of the field workers said they are informally reminded by Dispatch Center personnel about personal safety when they sign out a vehicle.

The Public Health nurse interviewed said the nurses feel comfortable working around persons with communicable diseases because of their training, safety procedures and equipment.

None of the six interviewed knew where to find the written safety procedures, nor had they received any formal safety training subsequent to their initial training.

However, senior HHS personnel said safety is something the field workers practice routinely. Additional safety training would be expected when a person transitions back into field work. That senior person also said, “We don’t say we’re going to review this every six months. But it is something we do emphasize.”

The HHS safety policies and procedures are contained in three documents: the Yuba County Health and Human Services Department Policy APS-001-011, the Yuba County Health and Human Services Department Policy APS-002-001 and the Yuba County Health and Human Services Department Policy EMP-002-001.

HHS safety policies and procedures are summarized as follows:

- HHS’s Dispatch Center must be staffed from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and is responsible for tracking field workers performing in-home visits.
- Field workers must notify the Dispatch Center and their supervisor when they leave for an in-home visit. When the field worker is going to an in-home visit where there have been concerns about safety or to a new client, he must give the Dispatch Center a time when he expects to have the home visit completed. If the field worker does not report back within a five-minute time frame from scheduled, Dispatch Center will initiate the procedure to attempt to contact the field worker. If they cannot contact the field worker, the Dispatch Center is to notify law enforcement.
- During overnight hours, weekends and holidays, the Yuba-Sutter On-Call Center assumes the responsibilities of the Dispatch Center.

- All field workers must have a county-issued cell phone while making in-home visits.
- Field workers have code words to alert the Dispatch Center in cases where they perceive they are in a dangerous situation, or where they cannot talk openly and when law enforcement support may be required.
- A field worker has the option to take another employee with him, if the field worker has concerns about the area of the visit, or the family being visited
- If the field worker has serious concerns about his personal safety, he may request law enforcement back up.

FINDINGS

- F1. The three most common areas of concern for HHS field workers are dogs, unexpected or unknown persons in the home and poor cellular communication in the foothills.
- F2. HHS field workers were generally aware of personal safety procedures due to verbal reminders from Dispatch Center personnel.
- F3. None of the field workers interviewed said they knew about HHS Policy and Procedures manuals.
- F4. None of the field workers interviewed said they had received any safety training subsequent to their initial training.
- F5. Senior HHS personnel said that safety is emphasized by HHS and is something field workers practice routinely.
- F6. There is an inconsistency between field workers' safety knowledge and training and what senior HHS personnel believe is provided.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. HHS should develop and provide annual safety training for its field workers.
- R2. HHS should consider the feasibility of providing field workers with defensive tools for protection against aggressive or overly protective animals.
- R3. HHS administration should commend its Dispatch Center personnel for their ongoing personal safety-reminders to field workers.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal code section 933.05, the grand jury requests responses as follows:

From the following individuals:

- Director, Health and Human Services Department, R1-R3

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.

Yuba County Health and Human Services Department Policy APS-001-011

Yuba County Health and Human Services Department Policy APS-002-001

Yuba County Health and Human Services Department Policy EMP-002-001

Yuba County Human Resources and Organizational Services injury report dated Dec. 7, 2011

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Yuba County Grand Jury 2011-2012

Concern for Our Seniors



"What's this?"

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Concern for Our Seniors

SUMMARY

“Does Yuba County provide a free service to call seniors on a daily basis?”

Through research, the Grand Jury members discovered a free service called “Caring Calls.” This is a daily telephone contact program available to all residents in the greater Yuba County area. This service is funded under the Sutter-Yuba Mental Health Services, Prevention Services, a joint program between Yuba and Sutter counties. To enroll, call 530-674-5253 to place a name on the Caring Calls list.

BACKGROUND

A concern was brought to the Grand Jury that seniors in their homes may benefit from a free service which would check on their welfare on a regular basis. Many seniors in the greater Yuba County area live alone. There is often no one responsible for checking on their welfare on a regular basis.

APPROACH

Members of the Grand Jury interviewed seniors and asked them if they were aware of any Yuba County programs which provide a free daily phone call to seniors. Additionally, several agencies in the greater Yuba County area were contacted to determine if they provide or are aware of this type of service.

DISCUSSION

Members of the Grand Jury started with the basic question, “Does Yuba County provide a free service to call seniors on a daily basis?”

Members of the Grand Jury conducted phone interviews with seniors who live alone at home. They all gave similar answers, i.e., they were unaware of an agency that provides free calls to seniors on a daily basis.

In an interview with the Chief Administrative Officer of Yuba County, he stated he knew of no such agency in the county that provides free calls to seniors on a daily basis. However, he did provide contact information for people and agencies who may know.

Members of the Grand Jury then interviewed the Director of Yuba County Health and Human Services and the Program Director of Adult Protective Services. The HHS director stated that county services, such as phone calls to seniors, are provided on a “need” basis to residents who qualify for certain programs. The HHS director also said

Yuba County Health and Human Services does not provide free calls on a daily basis to seniors, nor was staff aware of any other agency that did.

The Prevention Services Coordinator for Sutter-Yuba Mental Health Services was interviewed. He was also unaware of any program or service that provides free calls to seniors on a daily basis.

Research discovered a listing in the Yuba City Parks and Recreation Activity Guide for “Caring Calls,” which reads:

“What a terrific way to get your day started! A Caring Calls volunteer will enrich your life by calling you daily ‘just to check in.’ It’s amazing how just a few minutes of chattering can make your day that much brighter! Please call 674-5253 to enroll in this program.”

This free service is available to anyone living in the greater Yuba County area that enrolls. Seniors may enroll themselves or be referred by others. Members of the Grand Jury also learned that this service is available to younger persons, based on their physical or mental health concerns.

Interviews revealed there is little awareness of the existence of this program, which is funded under the Sutter-Yuba Mental Health Services, Prevention Services.

FINDINGS

- F1. A service that provides free calls to seniors on a daily basis in the greater Yuba County area does exist, which is called “Caring Calls.”
- F2. The CAO of Yuba County was not aware of the service providing free calls to seniors on a daily basis.
- F3. The Director Yuba County Health and Human Services was not aware of the free service providing calls to seniors on a daily basis.
- F4. The Prevention Services Coordinator for Sutter-Yuba Mental Health Services was not aware of the free service providing calls to seniors on a daily basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The Yuba County Board of Supervisors, as county leaders, should recognize the “Caring Calls” service and should develop a public awareness campaign using all available media to ensure the widest possible dissemination about this free service.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal code section 933.05, the grand jury requests responses as follows:

From the following governing bodies:

- Yuba County Board of Supervisors R1

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Yuba City Parks & Recreation – Activity Guide, Fall 2011, P.13

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Yuba County Grand Jury 2011-2012

History of Flood and Flames: Emergency Preparedness of Yuba County



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HISTORY OF FLOOD AND FLAMES: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS OF YUBA COUNTY

SUMMARY

Yuba County has a long history of fires and floods. Over the past century and a half the county's responses to these emergencies have varied. When the next emergency arises, Yuba County Office of Emergency Services should be well prepared to respond. Its Manager has been proactive; managing an active department despite personnel cutbacks, rebuilding the emergency operations center, finding federal and state grants, and ensuring that the county, as well as the two incorporated cities located within – Marysville and Wheatland – are also prepared. However, during the Grand Jury's inquiry, the members found that Marysville's preparations are deficient. When the Emergency Operations Manager inspected that city's documents, he determined that they do not qualify as an Emergency Operations Plan in accordance with California Emergency Management Administration requirements. Included in those requirements are the need for a Table of Contents and, more importantly, Operational Checklists. Without these checklists, coordination between incoming and relief personnel during a disaster would be difficult, thus placing unnecessary roadblocks in the way of vital government emergency response work.

GLOSSARY

- OES** - Yuba County Office of Emergency Services has the responsibility to coordinate disaster activities, before, during, and following catastrophic emergencies impacting the citizens of Yuba County. The department provides planning, training and coordination to county departments and allied agencies throughout the county.
- [\(http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/departments/oes/\)](http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/departments/oes/)
- FEMA** - Federal Emergency Management Agency is part of The Department of Homeland Security. FEMA's mission is to support citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.
- <http://www.fema.gov/about/index.shtm>
- NIMS** - National Incident Management System is part of FEMA and provides a systematic, proactive approach to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents, regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity, in order to reduce the loss of life and property and harm to the environment.
- <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/AboutNIMS.shtm>

CalEMA - California Emergency Management Agency is responsible for the coordination of overall state agency response to major disasters in support of local government.

(<http://www.calema.ca.gov/LandingPages/Pages/About-CalEMA.aspx>)

Command Center - Yuba County Office of Emergency Services command center. A countywide facility outfitted with radios, satellite phones, individual work stations, laptop computers and video-conferencing equipment.

BACKGROUND

Yuba County measures 640 square miles; of that, 13 square miles are covered by water. Elevations range from 35 feet to 4,820 feet above sea level. Yuba County includes portions of both Plumas and Tahoe national forests, as well as the Dry Creek Floodplain.

Yuba County has suffered significant damage from both fire and flood. The Williams Fire in 1997 and the Pendola Fire in 1999 burned thousands of acres; destroyed homes, buildings and vehicles; and displaced thousands of people, as well as their pets and livestock. Damage from these two fires cost the county taxpayers six million dollars. Major flood damage occurred when levees failed on the Yuba River in 1986, and failed again on the Feather River in 1997.

The Office of Emergency Services (OES) was established to coordinate emergency management and response between public service providers who serve the community and residents of Yuba County. The OES also ensures that the County stays in compliance with state and federal mandates, which determines eligibility to receive Disaster Recovery Funds.

APPROACH

Members of the Grand Jury interviewed:

- Emergency Operations Manager
- One member of the Board of Supervisors
- Yuba County Sheriff
- Yuba County Undersheriff
- Marysville Chief of Police
- Wheatland Chief of Police
- Marysville Mayor

Grand Jury members toured the Yuba County Office of Emergency Services facility, which is located in Marysville.

Members of the Grand Jury reviewed the following documents:

- County of Yuba OES Emergency Plan

- County of Yuba Emergency Management Structure
- Countywide Slow Rise Flood Plan
- City of Wheatland Emergency Operations Plan
- Wheatland City Council's Letter of Resolution to adopt the OES Emergency Operations Plan
- City of Marysville Basic Multi-Hazard Plan
- City of Marysville Basic Multi-Hazard Plan, Management Section
- Letter of request for OES compliance training from Marysville Chief of Police to OES and the Emergency Operations Manager reply.
- Yuba County Multi-Jurisdictional Multi-Hazard Plan
- Yuba Community College District Guide for Emergency Operations
- OES Fiscal Year 2010/2011 Budget Narrative
- OES Fiscal Year 2008/2009 Budget Workshops
- OES Budget Information 2007-2009
- City of Marysville Employee FEMA Compliance List.

DISCUSSION

Members of the Grand Jury began an inquiry to determine Yuba County's level of preparedness in an emergency situation, such as flood, fire, or catastrophic accident. Grand Jury members met with the Emergency Operations Manager on four occasions: once at an Emergency Preparedness event in Wheatland and three times at the OES facilities in Marysville. Interviews included a detailed tour of the command center and an explanation of maps and emergency operation plans for potential disasters.

From the onset of the inquiry, it seemed evident to the members of the Grand Jury that OES administration is committed to making the most of limited budget and staff. The Manager stated that because of continual cuts in funding each year, the OES had been reduced to one full-time and one part-time position. Faced with an ever-increasing list of governmental requirements, the Manager expressed that he and the County Administrative Officer have sought and continue to seek out funding through government grants. Other county employees have been cross-trained to staff the command center in an emergency.

Due to successful grant procurement, the command center is currently equipped with updated technology, including satellite phones and video conferencing, which is valuable not only in preparation for emergency response, but is used regularly in cross-county training. Training held in the OES, now possible between all 58 counties, saves travel expenses; it also greatly reduces county employee time away from their daily jobs.

The Manager also said the county has been awarded enough funding to purchase narrow band transmission radios which are necessary to meet newly-required Federal Communication Commission frequency standards. The bulk of total grant monies went to update and stock the center. The monies also provided staff training in radio operations and computer applications,

essential for utilizing the new equipment. The addition of two radio repeaters increases radio coverage area and radio efficiency. The upgraded technology and training allow the county to be more self-sufficient and lowers its costs of operation. The Manager said he feels “absolutely confident in what’s now in effect,” regarding the OES Operations Center.

One important function of the OES is to ensure that Yuba County’s two incorporated cities, Marysville and Wheatland, maintain compliance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and California Emergency Management Agency (CalEMA).

It is only by maintaining NIMS compliance - employees current on all levels of required training - that a city may qualify to receive Disaster Recovery Funds. The Emergency Operations Manager stated that his office has devoted considerable time and effort to help both Marysville and Wheatland meet these requirements.

Members of the Grand Jury interviewed the Chiefs of Police from the cities of Marysville and Wheatland.

During the Grand Jury meeting with the Wheatland Chief of Police, the Chief said, although he is in charge of emergency response in his city, he considers his department like an extension of the OES, having adopted all its policies and procedures. The Chief shared that his department will be moving to a new facility soon, and will designate a portion of the new building for an emergency operations center. The Wheatland City Council has adopted the county’s OES Emergency Operations Plan, a copy of which has been provided to the Grand Jury.

Members of the Grand Jury interviewed the Marysville Chief of Police on two occasions. During the first visit he spoke of the various responsibilities that fall under his command, including emergency response. He stated that he would be in charge of an emergency evacuation, if one were required. When asked if there were an emergency plan available, the Chief replied, “Yes.” However, none was offered.

Since an emergency plan was not offered at the time of the first interview, the Grand Jury requested one, in writing, from Marysville city staff. Paper files of the Marysville Basic Multi-Hazard Plan, and City of Marysville Basic Multi-Hazard Plan - Management Section, were provided to the Grand Jury from City Hall (see Appendix B). The City of Marysville Basic Multi-Hazard Plan is dated January 2012, with many pages stamped “Rough Draft.” After reviewing the two files, it became apparent that they were not similar in layout or content to the OES Emergency Operations Plan on compact disc, which had been provided to the Grand Jury by the OES and the City of Wheatland.

A review of Marysville's documents indicated it does not qualify under CalEMA requirements as an approved emergency plan.