DISASTER PREPAREDNESS IN OUR COUNTY AND CITIES

Introduction

Santa Clara County (County) is vulnerable to a number of potential catastrophic events. At any given time, earthquakes, fires, floods, landslides, public health crises, hazardous material spills or even terrorist acts can occur. As for a major earthquake, everyone agrees that it is just a matter of time. The 2009-2010 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) conducted an inquiry into emergency preparedness of the cities within the County and the Santa Clara County Office of Emergency Services (County OES).

Background

While emergency preparedness begins at the local level, emergency management starts at the national level with a program called the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS is directed and administered by the Department of Homeland Security. Compliance with NIMS is coordinated in California by the State Office of Emergency Services, through the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). SEMS was developed in compliance with California Government Code §8607. County OES and its city emergency managers implement NIMS and SEMS through a) the established Incident Command system whereby police and fire work together using established protocols, and b) mutual aid requests where each city can call on its neighbors for equipment and personnel as needed.

The Grand Jury's inquiry consisted of interviews with 10 city emergency managers, the president of the 15-city Santa Clara County Emergency Managers Association (SCCEMA), and the director of the County OES, as well as attendance at SCCEMA meetings and visits to the County OES command center. The purpose of this inquiry was to observe the state of emergency preparedness and emergency management throughout the County.

Observations

The Local Level

Most cities have a designated emergency response manager (Emergency Manager), though there are instances where a particular city has gone without anyone in this position for several years. These individuals have senior positions within city management and generally report to the city manager, or to the fire or police chief, who

reports to the city manager or to the city council. The Emergency Manager is responsible for creating, updating and implementing the city's emergency plans. The plans typically have five elements:

- Hazard Analysis

- Prevention

- Preparedness

- Response

- Recovery

These plans are reviewed annually by each city and submitted to the County OES, but are not reviewed by this agency. Emergency Managers share details of their plans with other cities when requested, but are not required to review or coordinate their plans with neighbor cities. Emergency managers interviewed believed this was appropriate, as each city is unique geographically, demographically, and in terms of its resources and needs. One standardized plan would not "fit all."

Each city is responsible for its own emergency services and has its own emergency operations center (EOC). Generally, a city activates its EOC by direction from the city manager. Should the need arise, a city may request aid from neighbor cities and/or the County and/or the state. A city does not have to request support from the County.

In an emergency, fire, police and other related personnel employ the Incident Command system: depending on the nature of the problem, the commanding officer can take control of response efforts. If the emergency involves wildfire, for example, the fire chief would order and control necessary personnel and equipment. If the problem involves more than one discipline, fire and police for example, the fire and police chiefs would work in tandem, each controlling his or her own staff to handle all aspects of the emergency.

Each city's Emergency Manager belongs to SCCEMA. Voting members consist of all Emergency Managers and directors. SCCEMA holds monthly meetings and invites non-voting participants from other agencies and organizations that include but are not limited to the Red Cross, Santa Clara Valley Transit Authority, local universities, PG&E, Santa Clara Valley Water District, Mineta San Jose International Airport, California Air National Guard, NASA/AMES and Lockheed Martin. Meeting attendance is not mandatory. The meetings provide the opportunity for emergency personnel to network, address common issues and to hear presentations from consultants. There has been a recent effort to expand membership to include non-profits and businesses.

The Community Level

Most cities have community outreach programs to help provide residents with the decision-making and physical skills necessary to assist families and neighbors in an emergency. These programs can be accessed through the individual city's website. The most common program name is Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). All cities maintain web sites with varying levels of useful information about their CERT programs. CERT program participants gain a much better perspective of emergency preparedness.

The County Level

The County provides a modern EOC in San Jose. The County OES is operated by a director who reports to the county executive. The County is responsible for providing emergency management services to those residents of the county who do not live within city limits.

The County OES can be activated at the national, state or local level when two or more cities activate their EOCs. When activated, the County EOC serves as a command center for managers of the County's agencies, and also as a coordinating facility for those cities who have activated their own EOCs. The County does not assume control of a specific city's resources, as it does not have jurisdiction over the cities. However, the County does help facilitate requests for mutual aid among the County and the cities, and helps prioritize the requests for resources. There is a County Communications Center that serves as back-up to the EOC as well. Mobile command vans are also available.

In the event of an emergency, County employees are directed to first care for their families and then show up at their assigned emergency locations. Personnel who are expected to staff the EOC are responsible for bringing their own provisions; the County OES does not supply any emergency provisions for its staff.

The EOC has modern communications equipment but has only one conduit for its communications cables. Although the city and county fire departments are capable of communicating amongst themselves, the city police departments and county sheriff department do not have communications interoperability. The County depends in part on trained and registered amateur radio operators to provide communications between the County OES, cities and relevant agencies in the County during an emergency. They are one of the first sources to provide a damage assessment.

County OES also coordinates and writes grant requests to state and federal government, and manages the allocation of grant money to the cities. The grant process begins when the city Emergency Manager identifies a specific need. Much of the state and federal grant money has very specific restrictions. Some cities apply for their own grants and some depend on the County. The County and the cities frequently work with consultants to implement the programs that are funded by grants.

ALERTSCC

In 2009, the County successfully launched AlertSCC, a mass communications system that can be used to send emergency information and instructions to anyone living or working in the County. It utilizes the emergency 911 and 411 directory listings. If County residents register at www.alertscc.com, they can also specify a cell phone number as their primary contact number or select notification via text messages to personal digital assistants, computers or TTY/TDD devices.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury determined that all cities and the County have emergency operations plans, cooperate with each other to varying degrees, and have programs to inform citizens about preparing for an emergency.

All Emergency Managers with whom we spoke agreed that, no matter how well-prepared each city may be, citizens must be able to "go it alone" for three to five days after an emergency. To quote one city manager, "In a major disaster, your first responder is the guy next door."

The Grand Jury recommends that all residents learn to prepare for emergencies and assume responsibility for their own welfare in the event of a major emergency or disaster. Two specific recommended actions are:

1. Register their contact information at www.alertSCC.com; and

2. Participate in their local CERT programs.

CERT contact information can be found in the appendix.

Appendix

The following CERT information was valid as of 2/25/2010:

Campbell CERT
     408-866-2121
     www.ci.campbell.ca.us/Police/EmergencyPreparedness.htm

Cupertino CERT
     408-777-3335
     www.cupertino.org/index.aspx?page=610

Gilroy CERT
     408-846-0372
     www.gilroycert.com

Los Altos CERT
     650-947-2681
     www.losaltosca.gov/police/cert/cert.html

Los Altos Hills CERT
     650-947-2681
     www.losaltoshills.ca.gov/neighborhood-network

Los Gatos CERT
     408-354-6843
     www.town.los-gatos.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=152

Milpitas SAFE (Strategic Actions For Emergencies)
     408-586-2800
     www.ci.milpitas.ca.gov/government/fire/oes_safe_member.asp

Monte Sereno CERT (Combined with Los Gatos)
     408-354-6843
     www.town.los-gatos.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=152

Morgan Hill CERT
     408-776-7310
     www.mhcert.com

Mountain View CERT
     650-903-6825
     www.mountainview.gov/city_hall/fire/programs_n_services/cert.asp

Appendix - continued

Palo Alto PANDA   (Palo Alto Neighborhood Disaster Activities)
650-617-3164
www.cityofpaloalto.org/info/news/details.asp?NewsID=193&TargetID=60

San Jose CERT
408-277-4598
www.sanjoseca.gov/emergencyServices/SanJosePrepared/

Santa Clara HEAT   (Home Emergency Assistance Teams)
408-615-4940
www.santaclaraca.gov/index.aspx?page=487

Saratoga CERT
408-341-4485
www.saratoga.ca.us/cityhall/cmo/emprepinfo/cert/default.asp

Sunnyvale SNAP   (Sunnyvale Neighborhoods Actively Prepare)
408-730-7712
www.sunnyvale.ca.gov/Departments/Public+Safety/Office+of+Emergency

Santa Clara County CERT
408-808-7800
www.sccgov.org/portal/site/oes/ (select Volunteering and Training Opportunities from the menu on the left and it will take you to a page with a link to the CERT page)

This report was **PASSED** and **ADOPTED** with a concurrence of at least 12 grand jurors on this 27th day of May, 2010.

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Angie M. Cardoza
Foreperson

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Judy B. Shaw
Foreperson pro tem

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Mary Nassau
Secretary