

Standardized Emergency Management System County of Solano 2002-2003 Grand Jury Report

I. Reason for Investigation

The Grand Jury, after reviewing previous Grand Jury Reports, elected to review the effectiveness and continued development of the Solano County Emergency Management System.

II. Procedure

The Grand Jury:

- Reviewed Grand Jury reports completed in 1999 and 2000
- Interviewed Solano Manager and Assistant Manager, County Office of Emergency Services
- Interviewed Solano County Sheriff
- Interviewed Communications Manager, County General Services Department
- Analyzed Solano County Operations Hazardous Material Area Plan
- Toured Solano County Emergency Operations Center

III. Background

1. Development of emergency management systems continues to evolve as new and changing needs are recognized. The 1991 Oakland fire led to legislative Bill 1841 that specified a common organization structure must be used by governmental agencies. Unites States Code (USC) §8607 now requires all state agencies to operate under the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). Federal funding for reimbursement of disaster expenses is not available to cities and counties not operating in accordance with SEMS. SEMS functions at five levels: field, local government, operation area (Solano County's operational area includes seven cities and 40 districts), regional and state. Recent world events led to increased interest in public response capability.

2. Solano County fulfills State and Federal standards for SEMS. The County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is established in the Sheriff's facility in Fairfield. There is no regulatory requirement to have an alternate EOC but testimony emphasized strong logic in having an alternate capability in the event that the primary site was in the disaster area. A mobile unit is currently equipped to function as a backup operations center. Authorities testified that this mobile unit would have space and equipment limitations to operate during a major disaster. Limited alternate EOC capability is also identified in space leased at Nut Tree Airport. No equipment has been installed in that site due to lack of funding. Evacuation shelters are identified by each city at public schools and other locations. The County Emergency Operation Plan (CEOP) establishes procedures and organizational requirements for disasters such as earthquakes and major fire incidents.

3. The EOC operates with five functions: Management, Operations, Planning and Intelligence, Logistics and Finance and Administration. Representatives from each appropriate agency and affected district report to the EOC when it is activated. Activities represented include fire, law, medical and others. The EOC is activated anytime the Incident Center of a city or any two districts is activated. The space in the Sheriff's Office used by EOC is assigned dual use for departmental training and, therefore, must be "set up" at each EOC activation, a process that requires 60 to 90 minutes. The space is utilized daily by the Sheriff's Office for training activities so activation of the EOC for training or emergencies requires cancellation of the Sheriff's Office programmed

use. "Setting up" requires arrangement of furniture, mounting of appropriate maps and charts, preparation of status boards and activation of communication equipment. Planning officials expect to have dedicated space for the EOC after the current upgrade of county buildings is completed.

4. Training is essential to ensure competent response by the EOC. All county employees are subject to call for EOC duty. All new employees receive one hour of indoctrination training. Four hours of training are provided to management personnel. Sixty-seven employees are designated and trained to staff the EOC. Refresher training is required each two years. City Fire Department Chiefs are responsible for appropriate city employee training. Tabletop exercises are conducted several times annually to develop personnel, as well as procedural capabilities. Two exercises were successfully conducted in January 2003. One was with only law enforcement units to test coordination procedures. The second was a test by the Terrorism Working Group involving police and fire departments, ambulance service, military units, environmental services and commercial operations. Field exercises are infrequent but have been conducted with county agencies, as well as military units.

5. Communications capability is an essential requirement of SEMS. A significant number of telephone lines must be available for the many functions within the EOC that would be called to action for a major emergency. Backup capability now includes HAM radio, portable radios, cell phones and satellite communication with the State EOC. Radio contact with field units is critical. Discrete (dedicated) radio frequencies must be authorized for field-to-field unit communication, as well as field-to unit to the EOC. Without this capability, a complex emergency would generate interfering radio chatter that would degrade field units' response. Advance planning and management ensures effectiveness for both daily and emergency situations. The recommendations for radio interoperability as reported in the separate 2002-2003 Grand Jury investigation, "Public Safety Radio Inoperability," are also applicable to the EOC. The EOC could be included in that recommendation at little extra cost to the initial investment and would provide the above identified capability to emergency services.

6. The Solano County Sheriff's Office administers the SEMS budget and provides facilities for the County Emergency Services Manager. The current annual budget for the OES is \$300,000.00.

7. City Watch is an automated telephone system that targets specific groups of telephones or whole geographic areas for emergency management or evacuation purposes. It can operate in conjunction with, or independent of, the EOC.

8. An Early Alert System is in place and provides capability to broadcast emergency management information within the County by radio and television.

9. The Solano County Sheriff's Office established a civilian volunteer corps named Citizens Emergency Response Team (CERT), located within the unincorporated area of Vallejo. CERT volunteers receive training through the Sheriff's Office and the Vallejo Fire Department. The CERT mission is to affect search and rescue after a major disaster of large proportions such as an earthquake with large casualties causing municipal and county police and fire departments to be overburdened.

10. Emergency responses to hazardous material (Hazmat) incidents and accidents require personnel with special training. Response is categorized as analysis, entry and stabilize, decontamination of people and equipment and cleanup. The Solano County Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is actively involved through its Hazmat Section. This Section has responsibility, as prescribed by law, for regulatory compliance in the storage, handling and transportation of hazardous material within the County and for emergency response capability.

11. Hazmat incidents occurred 82 times in the five years from 1998-2002. Seventy-seven of those events were controlled with County resources. Fire departments assume site responsibility (jointly with Unified Command on County or State roadways) and are qualified to recognize the hazard through use of placards or other information, secure the scene, control fire, remove persons from harm, provide emergency medical aid and to perform initial decontamination of victims. Their capability to enter and stabilize a site is variable according to training and equipment. DEM's Hazmat Section has five specially trained members who respond with field kits to provide material identification and recommend appropriate response actions to Fire Departments at the site of a hazmat incident. Cleanup of a hazmat incident site is coordinated by the Hazmat Section staff who contract with appropriate commercial agencies that possess the necessary capabilities. Serious incidents requiring specially trained Hazmat Entry Teams are less common. Five such incidents have occurred in the County since January 1998. The Hazmat Entry Teams are certified in accordance with federal requirements for training and equipment to enter and stabilize hazardous material situations. Solano County does not have a Hazmat Entry Team. Hazmat Entry Teams are available from the City of Sacramento, Napa County (operated by California Department of Forestry in conjunction with Napa and Vallejo), Yolo County and San Joaquin County. For the five aforementioned incidents the City of Sacramento or Napa County were called and provided appropriate responses.

12. Fulfilling Hazmat Entry Team requirements can be satisfied by varying methods. Yolo County has a multi-agency team formed under cooperative agreements with the various cities each developing a capability in one or more functions. San Joaquin County is organized in a similar manner. A fully capable Hazmat Entry Team would have forty individuals trained and certified for respective duties and equipped with protective suits. The estimated costs of establishing this team are \$2 million and annual recurring costs would be approximately \$350,000. Testimony did not indicate a consensus that the County should fund an entry-level team. Another option is to continue unchanged with Memorandums of Understanding utilizing resources from neighboring counties.

IV. Findings and Recommendations

Each finding is referenced to the background reference number

Finding #1 - The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) requires dedicated space to ensure complete operational capability is immediately available upon activation. (3)

Recommendation #1 - The Solano County Board of Supervisors monitor the building assignments plan during the renovation period of County buildings to ensure that the space currently planned for the EOC is not assigned to a less critical function.

Finding #2 - Communications capabilities of the EOC do not satisfy requirements to control a complex emergency. (5)

Recommendation #2 - Ensure the EOC needs are incorporated in the current County study that is developing interoperability of radio communication between dispatch centers and mobile units of County and city agencies.

Finding #3 - Both the designated alternate EOC site and the mobile unit EOC require upgrade to provide an appropriate level of control during a major disaster in the event the primary EOC became unusable. (2)

Recommendation #3 - Evaluate the choice between a fixed or a mobile alternate EOC and consolidate all efforts into the better choice.

Finding #4 - Of 82 hazardous material incidents that occurred within Solano County since January 1998, five exceeded the capability of Solano County agencies. These incidents were satisfactorily controlled by trained Hazmat Entry Teams from the City of Sacramento and Napa County in accordance with Memorandums of Understanding. (11, 12)

Recommendation #4 - The Solano County Board of Supervisors carefully evaluate the comparative financial and response advantages of establishing a certified Hazmat Entry Team, of developing multi-agency teams, or of continuing Memorandums of Understanding with certified Hazmat Entry Teams from non-county resources.

V. Comments

The Solano County General Services Communications Department is completing a study of communications requirements and capabilities that will be applicable to Fire, Law, Medical and Emergency Management agencies. Though installation of the desired capabilities will have a major financial investment, the benefits in personnel efficiency and savings of life and property will be comparatively impressive. More details are presented in the 2002-2003 Grand Jury Public Safety Radio Interoperability Report. The potential of this study is to provide the Emergency Management Services, along with the other concerned agencies, tremendous improvements in response capabilities within budgetary constraints.

The determination process for the appropriate Hazmat Entry Team operating level must be initiated by cataloging personnel and equipment resources of city and County agencies as well as commercial resources. Thereafter, the determination can be facilitated by analyzing established procedures such as those used in Napa, Yolo and San Joaquin Counties and the City of Sacramento. Decision options should include multi-agency teams with a combination of capabilities from various agencies, continuing Memorandums of Understanding with adjacent county teams, or building a central response capability. Substantial federal grants are possible for start-up costs but there can be no assurance that federal aid would or should be expected for continuing costs.

Affected Agencies

- Solano County Board of Supervisors
 - Solano County Sheriff's Office
 - Solano County Department of Environmental Management
 - Solano County Communications Department
 - Solano County General Services Department
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