

**RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT**

Report Title: HUMBOLDT COUNTY EMERGENCY PREPARADNESS: READY OR NOT?

Report Date: June 16, 2023

Response: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

**FINDINGS**

The county agrees with Finding 5.

The county partially agrees with Findings 1,2, 6, 9 and 10.

The county disagrees with Findings 3, 4, 7 and 8.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendation 4 has been implemented.

Recommendation 3 is in the process of being implemented.

Recommendations 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7 will not be implemented.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of pages attached: 8



# COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

Board of Supervisors

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## INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
**FROM:** COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
**SUBJECT:** RESPONSE TO 2022-23 GRAND JURY REPORT "HUMBOLDT COUNTY EMERGENCY PREPARADNESS: READY OR NOT"  
**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 12, 2023

In the Grand Jury Report, "*Humboldt County Emergency Preparedness: Ready or Not?*" the Grand Jury has requested that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors respond to all Findings numbered 1 through 10 and all Recommendations 1 through 7. I am proposing the following responses as detailed below.

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### FINDINGS

*Finding 1:* *No evidence could be found that the County's Disaster Council has met since the adoption of the Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan in 2015. As a consequence of not being active, the Disaster Council provides no direction with regard to emergency planning, communication, coordination, or response within the County.*

#### **Response: Partially Agree**

The Disaster Council has met since the adoption of the county's Emergency Operations Plan. The last meeting took place on May 25, 2018.

It should be noted that since the Disaster Council's last meeting, the County of Humboldt has experienced several emergency activations including, but not limited to, Power Safety Shutdown (PSPS) events, the COVID-19 pandemic, many fires, and most recently, the Dec. 20, 2022 earthquake and 2022-2023 winter storms. When an emergency is declared, it has been the practice of the county's Office of Emergency Services (OES) to form an incident policy group, whose focus is to provide recommendations regarding the county's emergency response. The policy group performs the same functions as the Humboldt County Disaster Council would in the absence of an emergency. In 2020-2021 incident policy group meetings were held regularly to provide guidance on the

county's response to COVID-19. Additionally, in 2022 a policy group was formed and met regularly in response to the Dec. 20, 2022 earthquakes and winter storm incidents.

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***Finding 2:** The Humboldt County Disaster Council does not have a process to identify how the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Disaster Council is selected. As a consequence, the twice-yearly meetings have not been scheduled.*

**Response: Partially Agree**

Humboldt County Code 2210 et al does not explicitly state the personnel designated to serve as the Chair or Vice Chair of the Disaster Council, or the process by which those roles are selected. Meetings in the past have historically occurred at regular times of the year with materials for the meetings provided by OES staff. These meetings often reviewed drafts of plans in order to fulfill the Disaster Council's purpose of recommending policies to the Board.

It should be noted that the Office of Emergency Services was established by the Board of Supervisors with the adoption of Ordinance 961 ("Emergency Organization and Functions of the Humboldt County Disaster Council") in 1974, not 2011 as stated in the Grand Jury report. It appears throughout the history of OES, which has moved from the General Services Department (1974-1983) to the County Administrative Office (1983-1998), to the Sheriff's Office (1998-present), the Director of Emergency Services has been the department head who is responsible for the OES function and that individual also served as the defacto chair of the Disaster Council, with their immediate subordinate serving as the Vice-Chair. Absent an explicit statement in the County Code, it is under the authority of the Board of Supervisors to modify the code and designate the Chair and Vice Chair of the Disaster Council.

While the county agrees that twice yearly meetings of the Disaster Council have not been scheduled, this was not due to the lack of the selection of a Chair or Vice-Chair. Staff turnover has contributed to this, and as previously mentioned, the occurrence of multiple emergencies and recovery efforts in relation to said emergencies have been the priority of the county.

Policy groups have been formed and met regularly to provide guidance for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, and in 2022-2023 in response to the Dec. 20, 2022 earthquakes and 2022-2023 winter storms. These policy groups perform the same functions as the Humboldt County Disaster Council would in the absence of an emergency.

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***Finding 3:** Without a selected Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Humboldt County Disaster Council to appoint members to the Disaster Council, most of the Disaster Council membership slots defined in the 2011 ordinance, as well as recently state-mandated slots such as culturally diverse communities, remain vacant, which leads to no oversight of the existing 2015 Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan.*

**Response: Disagree**

As the Director of Emergency Services, the Humboldt County Sheriff oversees the Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan. Recommendations provided by the state regarding Disaster Councils are not obligatory. Humboldt County Code 2210-4, which establishes the local disaster council, follows many of the state's recommendations pertaining to the inclusion of members representing law enforcement, fire, medial, utilities and

volunteer agencies and organizations. When an active emergency occurs, the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services (OES) partners regularly with such aforementioned agencies and organizations.

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*Finding 4: No evidence could be found that the existing 2015 Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan has been completely reviewed or revised by Humboldt County since 2015. As a consequence, emergency response may be uncoordinated and delayed, and the public may not be authoritatively advised on proper emergency preparedness.*

**Response: Disagree**

The County of Humboldt's responses to recent emergency activations, including but not limited to, the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 winter storms, Knob Fire, Six Rivers Lightning Complex Fire, Dec. 20, 2022 earthquakes have been timely and highly coordinated efforts. There is no empirical evidence that the 2015 Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) has delayed the county's recent emergency responses or compromised the ability for the public to receive timely lifesaving incident-related information. The county's timely response to these emergencies have confirmed that the emergency response structure defined in the 2015 EOP has been successful. Furthermore, the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, Department of Public Works, UC Cooperative Extension, and Department of Health & Human Services regularly provide the community with resources or guidance on proper emergency preparedness. Additionally, county staff representing multiple departments and representatives of local agencies called to respond in the event of a disaster regularly attend emergency response trainings and tabletop exercises to practice coordinated and timely responses for incidents such as tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, cyber-attacks, mass shootings, aeronautical disasters, wildfires, and more.

That said, OES staff reviews the Humboldt County EOP as regularly as time allows and have been updating and revising the document since 2021. OES staff are required to focus on active emergency and recovery efforts when incidents or disasters occur, which has delayed the EOP revision process. County staff have learned a great deal from responding to active incidents in recent years and will incorporate what has been learned when revising the EOP. It is currently anticipated that the revised draft EOP will be ready to be submitted for review in late 2024 or 2025.

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*Finding 5: The Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services is understaffed, which contributes to a lack of capacity to revise and update its Emergency Operations Plan.*

**Response: Agree**

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*Finding 6: The existing Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan has yet to be reviewed or commented upon by the California Office of Emergency Services. As a consequence, there may be flaws in the plan; emergency response may be uncoordinated and delayed, and the public may not be authoritatively advised on proper emergency preparedness.*

**Response: Partially Agree**

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) did not review Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) in 2015, however, it should be noted that Cal OES did not require the state's review of

EOPs from local jurisdictions until 2021. Humboldt County OES is in regular communication with Cal OES, and discussions have been had with Cal OES regarding scheduling a review of Humboldt County’s revised draft EOP. It is currently anticipated the revised draft EOP will be ready for submission to Cal OES in late 2024 or 2025.

As mentioned previously, responses to recent emergency activations, including but not limited to, the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 winter storms, Knob Fire, Six Rivers Lightening Complex Fire, Dec. 20, 2022 earthquakes have been timely and highly coordinated efforts. There is no empirical evidence that the 2015 Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan has delayed the county’s recent emergency responses or compromised the ability for the public to receive timely lifesaving incident-related information. The county’s timely response to these emergencies have confirmed that the emergency response structure defined in the 2015 EOP has been successful. Additionally, the Humboldt County Sheriff’s Office, Office of Emergency Services, Department of Public Works, UC Cooperative Extension, and Department of Health & Human services regularly provide the community with resources or guidance on proper emergency preparedness.

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*Finding 7: Emergency preparedness training of the public is sporadic, due in part to lack of available staff. This lack of training leaves everyone to fend for themselves for an undetermined amount of time.*

**Response: Disagree**

The Humboldt County Sheriff’s Office of Emergency Services, Department of Public Works, UC Cooperative Extension, Department of Health & Human Services, and the Humboldt County Library partner with a wide variety of community organizations and agencies to regularly and consistently provide the public with an array of emergency preparedness trainings on topics such as wildfire, tsunami, flood and earthquake preparedness, food storage, safety and preservation, Narcan training, mass notification and emergency mapping, and more.

Recently, Humboldt County OES partnered with the Humboldt County Fire Safe Council and UC Cooperative Extension’s Fire Advisor to engage the public on wildfire preparedness and evacuation best practices. Wildfire preparedness workshops were held in Garberville, Shelter Cove, Willow Creek and Honeydew. Workshops included topics such as wildfire prevention, preparedness, and evacuation-related topics and were designed to help residents understand how to prepare their homes and properties for wildfire; plan and prepare to evacuate; and learn what to expect from the County Office of Emergency Services and CAL FIRE during a wildfire emergency.

Humboldt County OES has also conducted Stop the Bleed trainings, where participants learn skills to help save a life before someone bleeds out, in Eureka, Arcata and Blue Lake. Plus, Blue Lake Rancheria regularly hosts Community Resiliency Fairs where Humboldt County OES always participates. Additional trainings provided to the community include amateur radio communications courses, earthquake drills including participation and the promotion of the Great California Earthquake Shakeout Day, participation in the annual North Coast Cascadia TsunamiCon event.

Additionally, since 2021 Humboldt County OES has completed Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainings for the public in Bridgeville, Eureka, Willow Creek, College of the Redwoods, Arcata, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Scotia. CERT trainings were also provided to staff at College of the Redwoods and the City of Arcata.

Finding 8: *There are no easily understood and readily available printed copies of Humboldt County emergency evacuation plans, routes, and maps, even for reasonably foreseeable emergencies. This omission leaves everyone within Humboldt County without critical decision tools to respond to an emergency or disaster.*

**Response: Disagree**

In 2021, Humboldt County OES collaborated with local governments and public safety partners to establish over 300 emergency zones throughout Humboldt County utilizing the Genasys Project (formerly known as Zonehaven) evacuation management platform.

This system allows for real time emergency mapping that members of the public and first responders can use during incidents requiring evacuation. Information for the public is posted on the county's website at <https://humboldtgov.org/3219/Evacuation-Mapping> and on county OES' social media pages.

It should be noted that that evacuation routes should not be communicated to the public prior to the occurrence of an incident requiring evacuation. All emergencies are unique, affecting a variety of locations under varying circumstances. If evacuation routes were provided to the public before an incident occurs and the routes become compromised due to an active emergency, it could place members of the public in potentially catastrophic and life threatening situation. As such, safe evacuation routes will be communicated to the public when evacuations are ordered.

In the event of an emergency, first responders and emergency service officials will use Genasys to determine necessary evacuations. From there, officials communicate evacuation orders and zone statuses to the public through the county's emergency alert system, Humboldt Alert, and the Genasys community site. Additionally, evacuation information will be communicated to the public via county's website, press releases, on county OES' social media sites, and in person by first responders at the scene of the incident.

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Finding 9: *The contact lists of the Humboldt Operations Area (Humboldt County) are cumbersome, informal, out-of-date, and not uniformly available among the emergency agencies. They presently have numerous errors and omissions, which can potentially lead to delays in the coordination of emergency responses.*

**Response: Partially Agree**

The Humboldt Operations Area contact lists need updating, and the Humboldt County OES is working on updating them. Contact lists for primary incident partners have been regularly maintained by Humboldt County OES, and there have been no reports of response delays related to active incidents in relation to the Humboldt Operations Area contact lists.

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Finding 10: *Humboldt County officials take Pacific Gas & Electric's assertions regarding the safety of the Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation at face value. There is no Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation component or business plan included in the County's 2015 Emergency Operations Plan. This omission may lead to a delay in emergency responses and hazard mitigation.*

**Response: Partially Agree**

It is the responsibility of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) to develop plans for incidents at PG&E's Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation (ISFSI) site. The county agrees that there is no ISFSI component included in the county's current EOP because the County of Humboldt is not responsible for this site.

Each year Humboldt County OES partners with Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) to review and update PG&E's Humboldt Bay Emergency Plan. This plan describes the county's role if an incident were to occur. In the event of an incident at PG&E's ISFSI site, county would respond by following best practices of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) that is applied to all disasters. For example, the County of Humboldt may assist with securing the site, providing public information messaging to the community upon the request of PG&E, and executing necessary response measures.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: *The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors fully staff and schedule the Disaster Council's meetings by no later than December 31, 2023. (F1, F2, F3)*

**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.**

While this recommendation has merit, the Director of Emergency Services (Humboldt County Sheriff) is responsible for staffing and scheduling Humboldt County Disaster Council meetings.

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Recommendation 2: *The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors expand the Disaster Council's required membership, which includes state-mandated members from culturally diverse communities, utilities, and emergency communications, as well as the integration of interpreters and translators by no later than December 31, 2024. (F3) (See Funding Recommendation under R5)*

**Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.**

While this recommendation has merit, the positions described in the recommendations are not mandated by the state. The state provides recommendations for local Disaster Council membership. It should be noted that any member of the Board of Supervisors could bring a discussion item forward to update Humboldt County Code 2210 in the future if there is interest in revising the county's current emergency organization and the functions and membership of the Humboldt County Disaster Council. The Sheriff's Office has expressed interest in updating this code.

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Recommendation 3: *The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors direct the Humboldt County Disaster Council in coordination with the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services to submit a comprehensively updated Emergency Operations Plan by no later than December 31, 2024. (F4, F5, F6)*

**Response: This recommendation is in the process of being implemented.**

As previously mentioned, Humboldt County OES staff reviews the Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan regularly and have been revising the document since 2021. County staff have learned a great deal from

responding to active incidents in recent years and will incorporate what has been learned when updating the EOP. It is currently anticipated that the revised draft EOP will be ready to be submitted for review in late 2024, however the adoption of the plan will likely occur in 2025 after the review process is completed.

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*Recommendation 4: The Humboldt County Sheriff clarify the chain of command and direction of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and other local volunteer emergency preparedness groups by no later than December 31, 2023. (F7)*

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.**

There are two Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) managed by Humboldt County OES. Humboldt County OES meets regularly with these teams and with the regional Humboldt CERT Coalition to discuss chain of command, emergency preparedness trainings and exercises and public outreach.

Additionally, Humboldt County OES communicates and meets often with other local volunteer emergency preparedness and recovery groups, including Humboldt Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD), Humboldt County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Posse, the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services' Auxiliary Communications Team, the Eel River Valley Long Term Recovery Group (LTRG), and Pay Forward Humboldt.

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*Recommendation 5: The Humboldt County Sheriff direct The Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services to write and print for release an easily-understood emergency preparedness handbook, including emergency evacuation routes and destination maps to all county residents and visitors by no later than March 31, 2024. (F8)*

- *Funding Recommendation: The Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors fund the expenses listed in R2 and R5 with existing appropriations in the current fiscal year. If current appropriations are not sufficient, the Grand Jury recommends that the BOS, at its next earliest opportunity, pursue additional funding from an appropriate agency, including state or federal agencies.*

**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable for the Board of Supervisors to implement.**

The Humboldt County Sheriff is responsible for directing Humboldt County OES. It should be noted that emergency handbooks have been developed and provided to the public at emergency preparedness outreach events for many years. Emergency preparedness information and materials are also posted on Humboldt County OES' social media pages and the county's website at <https://humboldtgov.org/2378/Prepare>.

In 2021, Humboldt County OES collaborated with local governments and public safety partners to establish over 300 emergency zones throughout Humboldt County utilizing the Genasys Project (Zonehaven) evacuation management platform. Genasys allows for real time emergency mapping that members of the public and first responders can use during incidents requiring evacuation. The Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services actively encourages the public to "know their zone" and advises the community to access Genasys so they can become familiar with their evacuation zone. This information is posted for the public on the county's website at <https://humboldtgov.org/3219/Evacuation-Mapping> and on Humboldt County OES' social media pages. Additionally, OES staff facilitates workshops throughout the year on the Genasys Project and topics related to mass notification and emergency mapping. their designated evacuation zone.

As mentioned previously, evacuation routes should not be communicated to the public prior to the occurrence of an incident requiring evacuation. All emergencies are unique, affecting a variety of locations under varying circumstances. If evacuation routes were provided to the public before an incident occurs and the routes become compromised due to an active emergency, it could place members of the public in potentially catastrophic and life threatening situation. As such, safe evacuation routes will be communicated to the public when evacuations are ordered.

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**Recommendation 6:** *The Humboldt County Sheriff direct the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services to update its contact directory annually and distribute it among the pertinent county emergency agencies and local volunteers serving on the existing Humboldt County Operational Area group, no later than December 31, 2023. (F9)*

**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.**

The Humboldt County Sheriff is responsible for directing Humboldt County OES. That being said, this recommendation is already in the process of being implemented by OES staff. When the updated lists are complete it will be distributed to Humboldt County Operational Area Group partners as deemed appropriate by the Sheriff and Humboldt County OES.

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**Recommendation 7:** *The Humboldt County Sheriff direct the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services to include a completely updated Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan that includes an annex or contingency plan, addressing any Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation-related emergencies by no later than December 31, 2024. (F10)*

**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.**

As mentioned previously, the Humboldt County Sheriff is responsible for directing Humboldt County OES. The County of Humboldt is not responsible for developing emergency plans for private companies or businesses; however, Humboldt County OES annually reviews and updates PG&E's Humboldt Bay Emergency Plan in partnership with PG&E. This plan describes the county's role if an incident were to occur. In the event of an incident at PG&E's ISFSI site, the county would respond by following the best practices of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) that is applied to all disasters. For example, the County of Humboldt may assist with securing the site, providing public information messaging to the community upon the request of PG&E, and executing necessary response measures.