



# HUMBOLDT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

WILLIAM F. HONSAL, SHERIFF/CORONER

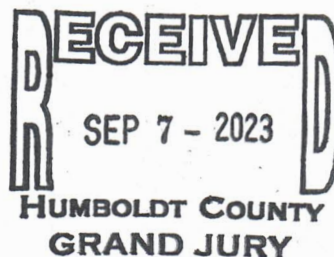
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August 29, 2023

Foreperson, Grand Jury  
County of Humboldt  
825 5<sup>th</sup> Street  
Eureka, CA 95501



RE: Grand Jury Report: Office of Emergency Services

Dear Honorable Foreperson,

Attached is my response to the Grand Jury report Emergency Preparedness. I appreciate the Grand Jury's report, findings, and recommendations. Though there is a difference of opinion regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Office of Emergency Services, I do appreciate the time and attention to the OES and the issues we face. We will be making sure to meet our deadlines and obligations regarding the Emergency Operations Plan and the Disaster Council. We will continue to do our best with the small staff we are budgeted to make sure we are ready when disaster strikes the county.

Sincerely,

  
William F. Honsal  
Sheriff  
707.268.3618

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## 2023 RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Humboldt County Emergency Preparedness

Report Date: 06/16/2023

Response by: W. Honsal, Sheriff, County of Humboldt

### FINDINGS

1. See attached information

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. See attached information

Date: 8/29/2023

Signed: W. Honsal

Number of pages attached: 8

## RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSE SUMMARY STATEMENT

### 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 (choose one): Partially Agree**

Unfortunately, I couldn't locate the documentation to provide to the Grand Jury during their fact-finding phase. However, following the publication of the Grand Jury report, we discovered that there is documentation indicating that the Disaster Council last convened on May 25, 2018. In the years since that meeting, there have been numerous transitions in executive and managerial staff that previously comprised the Disaster Council membership. Additionally, near-consecutive emergency activations in Humboldt County have led to the cessation of these meetings.

During emergency activations, an Office of Emergency Services Policy Group is typically established to offer input, recommendations, and guidance on the county's response, effectively carrying out the functions that the Disaster Council fulfills in the absence of an emergency. Policy Group meetings occurred regularly in 2020 and 2021, providing policy and administrative guidance for the county's response to COVID-19, and in 2022, in response to the winter storm incidents and the December 2022 Ferndale Earthquake

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 (choose one): Disagree**

The Humboldt County Code establishes control over the Office of Emergency Services with the Office of the Sheriff. County Code 2210-7 empowers the Director of Emergency Services (Sheriff) to manage and direct the efforts of the emergency organization within the County to achieve the objectives of this ordinance. Additionally, the Director is authorized to represent the County in all interactions with public or private agencies concerning emergency matters. The Deputy Director (Undersheriff) provides assistance to the Director as required and assumes the Director's responsibilities in their absence.

The OES practice and policy designates the Sheriff and Undersheriff as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Disaster Council by default. However, the biannual meetings have not been scheduled since 2018 due to the occurrence of nearly consecutive emergencies, ongoing recovery efforts,

changes in crucial Council positions, and complications stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

***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 (choose one): Disagree**

As mentioned in the response to F2, the Disaster Council has not convened since 2018 due to a range of complexities stemming from changes in staff and consecutive activations of emergency responses, along with ongoing recovery endeavors. Local Disaster Councils do not have state-mandated positions apart from the Chair and Vice-Chair roles; however, there are suggestions that local Disaster Councils incorporate the following roles:

- The Sheriff/Director of Emergency Services or their appointee to act as the chairman.
- The Chair of the Board of Supervisors or their representative to serve as the vice-chairman.
- A representative from each city, nominated by their respective city councils.
- Emergency services chiefs designated in the current emergency plan of this jurisdiction, established in line with ordinance 2210. This may include a fire representative appointed by the Fire Chief's Association and a law representative chosen by the chiefs of police.
- Representatives from civic, business, labor, veterans, professional, or other organizations with official emergency responsibilities. These appointments can be made by the director with guidance from the governing body. For instance, one representative from the school district and one from each of the special districts might be included.
- The Emergency Services Program Manager.

These recommendations are suggested by the state and are not obligatory. The existing Humboldt County Code that institutes the Disaster Council and outlines its composition closely adheres to the state's recommendations.

***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 (choose one): Disagree**

I do not recall receiving a request from the Grand Jury for the 2015 Emergency Operations Plan. The process of revising the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) has been underway, with my OES team actively working on the revisions since July 2021. OES Manager, Ryan Derby and this staff of 2, have been actively working to fulfill all of our state mandated reports, emergency preparedness, emergency response, and recovery. Progress on reworking this plan has

encountered delays due to numerous high-profile emergency activations, including the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Late 2021 Winter Storm, the 2022 Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai Eruption, followed by a tsunami advisory across Coastal California, the Knob Fire, Six Rivers Lightning Complex, the 2022 December Ferndale Earthquake, the 2022-2023 Early Winter Storms, and the 2023 February-April Storms.

During emergency activations, the Office of Emergency Services staff are expected to shift their focus from non-mandated day-to-day services to response operations. An updated or rewritten draft of the EOP is anticipated to be distributed for initial review in late 2024. It's important to note that the Emergency Operations Plan is not intended to serve as a step-by-step response manual; rather, it establishes the overarching structure for implementing an emergency response.

The 2015 plan has not resulted in uncoordinated or delayed response actions, nor has it impacted the public's ability to receive incident-related information. The series of emergencies that have taken place in Humboldt County over the past several years have demonstrated the efficacy of the structure outlined in the 2015 plan. These incidents have also offered emergency management personnel valuable insights for improvements to be incorporated into the upcoming version of the plan.

***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 (choose one): Agree**

The present staffing levels within the Office of Emergency Services impose constraints on the county's capacity to create and revise plans, create and execute emergency exercises and training, manage applications for grants linked to emergency preparedness and management, proactively partake in mitigation endeavors, and draft or update emergency-related policies. The consolidation of all of the County emergency management programs into a single department could serve as a solution to mitigate some of these obstacles. This consolidation offers the prospect of consolidated funding, harmonized objectives, and a cohesive mission. Such a step may potentially result in heightened efficiency, expanded service provision, and cost savings. In a small county, consolidation is the only way we can maximize resources and efforts to meet all of our federal, state, and local expectations.

***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 (choose one): Partially Agree**

The California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) did not require that local EOPs be reviewed by the state until 2021. Local OES has been engaging with Cal OES on review scheduling and is anticipating a review of the updated draft plan sometime in 2024/2025 (upon completion of the EOP rewrite).

**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 (choose one): Disagree**

Emergency preparedness training has been consistently conducted, both throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and up to the present day. Multiple Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainings have been scheduled annually since 2021, taking place in various locations throughout the county such as Bridgeville, Eureka, Willow Creek, the College of the Redwoods (one session for staff and one for the public), the City of Arcata (one for city staff and one for the public), Ferndale, Fortuna, and Scotia. Public engagement initiatives related to wildfire preparedness, mass notification, and emergency mapping have also taken place at various locations including Garberville, Shelter Cove, Willow Creek, and Mattole Valley. Community preparedness fairs have been organized at the Blue Lake Rancheria and Stop the Bleed trainings have been held in Eureka, Arcata, and Blue Lake.

Additional community courses have covered topics like Amateur Radio, earthquake exercises/drills, TsunamiCon, Shakeout, and countywide communications/notifications exercises, among others. These training events are currently ongoing and are widely promoted through Humboldt County OES's social media pages and website.

Thanks to these robust efforts to educate the public about emergency preparedness, coupled with their own experiences during numerous local emergencies, our community now has greater access to accurate emergency preparedness information, education, and firsthand knowledge than ever before. In light of the potential impact of a major emergency in Humboldt County, such as a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake, which could severely affect infrastructure and communication systems, community members are being made aware of the possibility of needing to rely on their own resources while emergency responders work to stabilize the situation. This crucial topic is consistently integrated into emergency preparedness outreach and training efforts. As a precaution, we strongly recommend that community members equip themselves with sufficient emergency supplies to sustain them for several days in the event of a catastrophic incident.

**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 (choose one): Disagree**

In 2021, Humboldt County OES initiated a partnership with Genasys Protect (formerly known as Zonehaven) resulting in the development of more than 300 distinct evacuation zones across the entire county. This system facilitates real-time incident mapping and enhances the capabilities of

the Humboldt Alert (Everbridge) mass notification system. It achieves this by offering an interactive map that both residents and first responders can utilize during evacuation-related scenarios. This web-based platform enables residents to access their designated evacuation zones before an incident arises. This encourages them to note down or remember their zone name, allowing them to cross-reference the map alongside emergency notifications. This enables them to understand their position in relation to the incident and receive essential action instructions (such as evacuation routes and designated assembly points).

It's important to note that evacuation routes will not be communicated before an incident occurs due to the unpredictable nature of emergencies. The evacuation route planning within OES is undertaken on a broader scale, focusing on primary entry and exit routes for Humboldt County zones. Detailed evacuation planning for individuals or neighborhoods is left to the residents themselves or their local fire departments. When evacuations are mandated, secure evacuation routes are provided to ensure the safety of Humboldt County residents.

Publishing evacuation routes before an incident could potentially compromise their viability, given the variable nature of emergencies. This could expose individuals to the risk of injury or even fatality, as they might rely on routes that become unsafe or inaccessible during the actual incident. It is the public's job to "know their Zone" in order to maximize their ability to follow the best evacuation route possible around the stated emergency in their zone.

*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 (choose one): Partially Agree**

An update to the Emergency Operations Area (OA) contact lists is tediously underway. The primary response agencies who typically assist in emergency responses have been maintained, and no undue delays in responses have occurred due to the state of the contact lists. Additional effort to keep the entire list updated should and will be implemented.

*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 (choose one): Disagree**

The County of Humboldt is not the primary entity responsible for incidents at the Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation (ISFSI), and as such has not developed a standalone plan outside of what the company responsible for the site has developed. Humboldt County OES works in partnership with PG&E annually for a review and update to the Humboldt Bay Emergency Plan, signing off on recommendations to the county's role and sending back signed agreement forms.

If an incident were to occur at PG&E's ISFSI site, the County of Humboldt could assist with securing the site, providing messaging at the request of the company, and implementing response structures (such as mass care services, distribution points, etc.) as needed.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

R1. The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors fully staff and schedule the Disaster Council's meetings by no later than December 31, 2023.

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

It is the responsibility of the Humboldt County Sheriff, not of the Board of Supervisors, to staff and schedule Disaster Council meetings, however, a new list of Council members and a schedule of meetings will be implemented following an update to Humboldt County Code 2210.

R2. 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.

**This recommendation will not be implemented.**

There is no state-mandated roster for Disaster Council membership. However, the state does offer recommendations for the composition of Disaster Council membership, which will be incorporated after an update to Humboldt County Code 2210. In alignment with state guidelines, the Disaster Council membership will consist of representatives from various agencies and organizations with disaster-related responsibilities.

R3. 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.

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

A comprehensive rewrite to the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) has been underway since late 2021. The Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services is on track to have a draft ready for initial review by 12/31/2024, however, a fully approved/adopted plan will likely occur in 2025.

R4. 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.

**This recommendation has been implemented.**

There are currently two (2) CERTs under the management of the Sheriff's Office of Emergency

Services (OES). Routine meetings with the two teams, as well as with the broader Humboldt CERT Coalition are held to discuss trainings, exercises, outreach, and chain of command. There has been no stated confusion or lack of clarity reported by any of the teams or team leaders, this is a well-functioning program that has steadily been expanding over the course of the past several years.

R5. 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.

**This recommendation will not be implemented.**

Emergency evacuation routes and destinations, including arrival points, are determined based on the immediate requirements of the incident and prioritizing life safety considerations. Emergency preparedness handbooks have been created and distributed to the general public for multiple years. These resources include 'Personal Emergency Plans,' accessible on the Humboldt County OES webpage. The webpage also features various other preparedness materials and resources, either directly available or linked, along with physical copies of different preparedness resources stored within OES' publication room. These materials are distributed as handouts during the numerous public outreach events routinely organized by OES.

Members of the public are actively encouraged to 'know their Zone.' They are advised to access the Genasys Protect (Zonehaven) system, which enables them to acquaint themselves with their specific area and all evacuation routes associated with that zone. It's essential to recognize that the emergency situation determines the appropriate evacuation route. The more familiar individuals are with their designated zone, the smoother their evacuation process can be during an emergency.

R6. 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.

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

The annual update to the contact list is underway, however, it will not be distributed to all Operational Area partners due both to privacy and security concerns and due to the size of the contact directory.

R7. 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.

**This recommendation will not be implemented.**

PG&E is the primary agency responsible for addressing incidents at the Independent Spent Fuel

Storage Installation (ISFSI). The County of Humboldt does not develop incident-specific emergency plans for private businesses, and our response to an incident at the ISFSI would follow the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) that is applied for all hazards. Additionally, the company's plan is submitted to Humboldt OES annually for review and agreement on the response actions/responsibilities listed for the county.