

2009 – 2010
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Madera County Disaster Planning

Introduction:

The Madera County Grand Jury visited the Sheriff's Department on January 13, 2010, and met with the Sheriff and the Emergency Services Coordinator (Coordinator). After an introductory overview by the Sheriff and a more detailed discussion of the disaster planning effort by the Coordinator, a general question and answer session was held. The Sheriff was very forthcoming and welcomed the interest of the Grand Jury in the planning process. A brief discussion with the owner of the local ambulance service was conducted on January 25th to clarify communication issues.

Findings:

The Madera County Sheriff has been designated the Director of Disaster Services for Madera County as an additional duty. The Emergency Services Coordinator has been with the Sheriff's Department since 2002 and with the Emergency Service Center (ESC) since 2007. The position is partially grant funded and the incumbent is the only permanent staff member.

In 2006 the National Incident Management System (NIMS) was established to help manage emergency events. The state is subdivided into six regions for disaster planning and mutual assistance. Madera County is in region five. The Tulare County Sheriff is the regional coordinator. Should the county need disaster assistance beyond its capability, the region would be contacted first, then the state and federal governments. Sharing of resources within a region precludes duplication of expensive equipment and allows for resources beyond the capability of any one county to provide.

Within the context of state guidelines, the county has developed initial plans and has conducted various emergency drills in cooperation with other county and state agencies. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is functional with adequate equipment and identified agency representatives who might be called when the EOC is activated. Initial assessment of likely county disasters has focused on wildfires, hazardous materials, and flooding. Terrorist activity is deemed unlikely within Madera County.

Interoperability/interconnectivity of communication systems among first responders has been a high priority, with the county being one of the first to develop such a system for police, CHP, and fire agencies. It was unclear if ambulance responders could communicate directly or needed

to be relayed from the central Emergency Medical Services (EMS) dispatch center located in Fresno. The ambulance company owner stated that the ambulances had radios capable of communication with the sheriff or fire vehicles on the scene of an incident although the capability was used rarely. The ambulances cannot radio directly to CHP vehicles. A redundant system of repeaters permits continued communication even if the central EMS dispatch in Fresno went down.

Emergency operations' planning is an ongoing process; the county is now working on the five-year update to the emergency response book. The Madera County Multi-Jurisdictional Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (Plan) is also under development with private contractor assistance and is the basis for further planning and mitigation funding requests once the plan is approved. This will hopefully be finalized and approved by the Board of Supervisors in late 2010. If potential disasters are identified in the plan, they become eligible for federal grant monies for mitigation of such events. The county has made the commitment to review, revise, and update the plan every five years to remain eligible for grants. The Plan is multi-functional and includes special districts.

A detailed emergency resource list, while ideal, has not been developed although the Sheriff is confident that equipment and supplies could be located if needed. The fire services, for example, take the lead in planning for wild fires. The Resource Management Agency has sand bags available in the event of flooding. Other departments within the county may be called upon as necessary.

Planning is complicated by the presence of independent or autonomous agencies within the county. Representatives of the two state prisons, the Rancherias, and Yosemite National Park respond with varying degrees of cooperation to the Sheriff. While part of the planning effort, the incorporated cities within the county have disaster response responsibilities of their own. Non-governmental and charitable agencies are also part of the expected disaster response but are not incorporated directly into the planning.

Available funding limits the resources to the planning effort. Aside from county efforts, training opportunities for responders are very limited.

Conclusions:

The Madera County Grand Jury found the Sheriff and the Coordinator to be performing useful emergency operations planning although limited by resources.

Assessment of disaster requirements is predicated on accurate prediction of likely disaster scenarios. Should the unexpected occur, planning must be flexible enough to respond by adapting existing plans.

Emergency operations planning should not be viewed as the sole responsibility of the Sheriff. While staffing for disaster planning within the sheriff's office is limited, other county agencies do planning as well and therefore would be available to the Sheriff as needed.

Communications interoperability remains a primary concern.

Recommendations:

- Planning and the exercising of the plans should continue and should receive the attention of all levels of county government.
- Even in this era of critical budget shortages, emergency planning and training should be supported. Grants and other non-county sources of support should be explored.
- Integration of all activities within the geographical boundaries of the County should be pursued.
- Communications interoperability should remain a firm goal and should include all responders.

Respondents: Written response required pursuant to PC933(c)

Madera County Board of Supervisors
200 W. 4th St.
Madera, California 93637

Madera County Sheriff's Department
Attn: Sheriff
14143 Rd. 28
Madera, CA 93638