

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Emergency Alerts and Communications

Report Date: June 20, 2021

Response by: City of Santa Rosa Title: Emergency Preparedness Manager

Agency/Department Name: City of Santa Rosa Fire Department

FINDINGS:

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F20**

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: **F8, F9, F10, F11, F19**

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed with an explanation of the reasons.)

RECOMMENDATIONS: R1, R4, R5, R15

Recommendations numbered: **R1, R4 and R5** have been implemented.

(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)

Recommendations numbered: **R15** will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

(Attach an explanation.)

Date: September __, 2021 _____ Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: 5

(See attached Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)

City of Santa Rosa’s Response to “Emergency Alerts and Communications” Grand Jury Report

We thank the Grand Jury for its attention to these matters which are so vital to the safety and well-being of our residents and visitors.

FINDINGS

We disagree wholly or partially with these finding(s):

F8. Due to the topography within Sonoma County, the re-institution of audible alarms such as air-raid sirens could dependably reach residents in remote areas and work as a reliable tried-and-true alarm system.

We disagree partially with this finding.

The City of Santa Rosa has researched the potential for the installation of a network of outdoor warning sirens within City limits. The City looked at siren technologies, system limitations, potential siren locations, as well as start-up and ongoing maintenance costs. Because the effectiveness of outdoor sirens may be compromised by topography, building materials, wind, time of day, vegetation and urban density this is not a reliable tried-and-true alarm system for City residents. While outdoor warning sirens can be beneficial under certain specific conditions, those conditions don’t exist uniformly across Sonoma County, including within the City of Santa Rosa. After careful consideration, the City has determined that outdoor warning sirens are not an efficient, reliable or cost-effective method to alert those within City limits. Further information on the numerous ways the City makes sure to reach as many residents as possible is discussed below in response to R1.

F9. Different evacuation zone designations for the same area (numbers, names, streets, areas, etc.) by the County, cities, CAL FIRE and agencies can lead to confusion for residents during an emergency.

We disagree partially with this finding.

While different zones for the same area would be confusing, the City has adopted a standard set of evacuation zones that use neighborhood/geographic naming conventions. The geographic borders and names used for the pre-designated evacuation zones within City limits have remained the same and have been consistent since their first publication in August of 2020.

F10. Because evacuation zones were not published or known, prior to the recent emergencies, residents were unaware of their evacuation zones.

We disagree partially with this finding.

The City of Santa Rosa published its evacuation zone maps to its website at srcity.org/EvacZones in August of 2020 during the LNU Lightning Complex. The City then sent a postcard Citywide that arrived in residents' mailboxes on or about September 1, 2020, with information on the City's new zones and instructions for residents regarding how to go online to look up their zone by address. Another Citywide mailing, which contained the evacuation zone maps and instructions on how to look up an evacuation zone online or by calling 2-1-1 for assistance, was mailed in phases to all City residents between March and May of 2021. Maps of all the City and County zones were again published in print media as part of a major public outreach campaign in June of 2021. The City has also utilized radio Public Service Announcements, social media campaigns, e-newsletter publications, community meetings and press coverage to continue education on evacuation zones.

F11. Not all police and fire agencies within the County show an Evacuation Map on their website.

We disagree wholly with this finding.

As of June 30, 2021, all cities and the County have posted all the evacuation zone maps on their respective websites.

F19. Various agencies, cities, and the public rely on the County Emergency Operations Plan for their disaster preparedness and best practices regarding the alerts and warning systems.

We disagree wholly with this finding.

An Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) is a high-level planning document which assigns responsibility for carrying out specific actions to agencies or organizations in an emergency; it sets forth lines of authority and shows how actions, at a high level, will be coordinated through all phases of emergency management. The EOP is not a procedural or tactical document. The City thus does not use or rely on its EOP for alert and warning tasks. An EOP is not the appropriate document for best practices regarding alert and warning systems. Instead, the City has separate well-organized checklists, procedures, manuals and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for alerts and warning systems. These documents are constantly reviewed and updated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. By October 31, 2021 the Sheriff's Office, Department of Emergency Management, and nine cities' departments include within their Emergency Operations Plans action steps to reach all subpopulations within the County who may not otherwise receive an alert. (F4, F6, F7, F8)

Response: Recommendation R1 has already been implemented and will continue to be reviewed and refined for continuous improvement.

The Grand Jury definition of sub-populations from Finding 4 of the Emergency Alert and Communications Report is as follows:

"There are some groups and individuals of the population who may not receive alerts directly; these include the elderly, tourists, farm workers, migrants, those hard of hearing, non-English speaking, and individuals with special needs."

While it is true that not every single group or individual may receive alerts directly, the City uses a multitiered systems of alert and warning tools, modalities, and outreach to make sure that as many people and groups as possible get each alert the City pushes out. The City uses Emergency Alert System (EAS), Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), SoCoAlert, Nixle, social media, police Hi-Lo tones and NOAA Weather radios concurrently to notify the public in the event of an evacuation or shelter in place.

The City is committed to providing outreach and working with all the identified subpopulations as defined by the Grand Jury and considers this consistent with what the City defines as vulnerable populations, at risk populations, people with disabilities and those with access and functional needs. As a member of the Countywide Access and Functional Needs and Alert & Warning working groups, the City spends a significant amount of time working to improve its alert and warning capabilities. Especially to those subpopulations identified by the Grand Jury.

The City works diligently to engage a variety of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs) and other service providers who work directly with these subpopulations to make sure that they all receive alert and warnings. The City also works to encourage neighborhoods, senior communities, and other community groups to augment the City's alert and warning messaging with 'neighbor helping neighbor' programs via Citizens Organized to Prepare for Emergencies (COPE) and Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) programs. City Emergency Management and Fire Department staff also regularly attend and participate in community meetings, outreach and education with the subpopulations identified to make sure they are signed up to receive alerts and are prepared for emergencies.

Since 2017, the City has added a number of additional bilingual staff to its EOC PIO team to ensure that all alert and warning message are published in both English and Spanish simultaneously.

In the spring and early summer of 2021, the City also distributed 12,000 All Hazards NOAA Weather Radios (NWR), at no cost to residents, and the radios were made available to all the subpopulations identified by the Grand Jury. NWRs are a low-cost home alerting tool that can be remotely activated by the National Weather Service (NWS) to broadcast life-saving warnings issued by first responders. NWRs include battery backups and do not rely on internet or data service to work. Radios furnished by the City of Santa Rosa are pre-programmed to the county's emergency frequency. The radios have an audible alarm tone and can be equipped with strobe lights and bed shakers for those with hearing impairments. NWRs are a great alternative to the other alert and warning systems that are used within Sonoma County and allow the City to reach a far broader population.

R4. By October 8, 2021, the Sheriff's Office, Department of Emergency Management, and nine cities work together to ensure consistent naming for all evacuation maps used by the public and first responders. (F9, F10, F11)

Response: Recommendation R4 has already been implemented.

The City of Santa Rosa hosts its map on its website at srcity.org/EvacZones

The consolidated map of County unincorporated and City evacuation zones is located at www.SoCoEmergency.org

The County of Sonoma and all nine incorporated cities within Sonoma County have implemented maps with consistent zone naming protocols.

R5. By October 8, 2021, the Sheriff's Office, Department of Emergency Management, and nine cities work together to ensure the public is informed of their evacuation zones by publishing evacuation maps in local media, online, and through SoCo Emergency. (F9, F10, F11)

Response: Recommendation R5 has already been implemented.

The City of Santa Rosa published its evacuation zone map (the same one in effect today) on August 20, 2020, during the LNU Lightning Complex Fire. The City mailed a postcard to every household Citywide around that same time as part of its introductory public education campaign. Those postcards were received in resident mailboxes on or about September 1, 2020. This was done in addition to other elements of the outreach rollout including press coverage, social media, Nixle, radio Public Service Announcements, and multiple inclusions in the City's e-newsletter that reaches more than 80,000 subscribers. Since then, the City has continued public education on its evacuation zones, including another Citywide mailing which was mailed in

phases reaching all residential households in the Santa Rosa city limits between March and May of 2021. All the City and County zones were again published as part of a major public outreach campaign in June of 2021. Virtual community meetings and additional outreach was implemented to continue to emphasize and educate the public on evacuation zones.

The City of Santa Rosa hosts its map on its website at srcity.org/EvacZones

The consolidated map of County unincorporated and City evacuation zones is located at www.SoCoEmergency.org

The City regularly works to provide emergency information through multiple communication channels, including neighborhood meetings, press coverage, a weekly e-newsletter, and social media, this includes reminders of the evacuation maps and the meaning of various alerts and how to sign up for them.

R15 By October 31, 2021, the nine cities update their Emergency Operations Plan to incorporate the most up-to-date information and lessons learned since the disasters of 2017 and post it on their websites.

Response: Recommendation R15 may not be implemented.

Since 2017, the City has developed after action reports (AARs) for every wildfire and any power safety power shut off (PSPS) of substance to impact the City. Recommendations and actions items from these AARs are a key element of our ongoing evaluation process and program development. While not all the improvements can be immediately implemented, every effort is made to review those reports and take documented corrective action steps towards improvement.

As stated above in response to F19, the EOP is a high-level document and is not an appropriate location for detailed information and lesson learned from prior disasters. Instead, the City will continue to update information and integrate lessons learned into the City's SOPs, checklists, procedures and manuals. The City will continue to document and work on areas for improvement.

The City's EOP is on a five-year planning cycle and is due to be updated in 2022. To the extent that any lessons learned need to be incorporated into the EOP, the City will do so at that time.