



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION DRIVE – ROOM 104A
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA 95403-2888
TELEPHONE (707) 565-2431
FAX (707) 565-3778

SHERYL BRATTON
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

CHRISTINA RIVERA
ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

NICOLE BERROCAL
DEPUTY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

MICHAEL GOSSMAN
DEPUTY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

August 20, 2018

The Honorable Gary Nadler, Presiding Judge
Sonoma County Superior Court
Hall of Justice
600 Administration Drive
Santa Rosa, California

RE: Response to the 2017-2018 Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury Report

Dear Honorable Judge Nadler:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above stated Civil Grand Jury Report. The following is the County Administrator's Office response to the Report titled "October Firestorm Emergency Response."

If you have any questions, or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 707-565-2588.

Sincerely;

Sheryl Bratton,
Sonoma County Administrator

cc: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Regina Nellor, Foreperson, Sonoma County Grand Jury

READ AND CONSIDERED
DATE 9/13/18 BY [Signature]

Response to Grand Jury Report

Report Title: October Firestorm Emergency Response

Report Date: June 20, 2018

Response By: Sheryl Bratton

Title: County Administrative Officer

Agency: Sonoma County Administrator's Office

FINDINGS

We agree with these finding(s):

F1. The County Emergency Operations Center faced numerous challenges early in its set-up, affecting efficiency.

F3. Due to demands for immediate tactical emergency response, emergency oversight and management were overwhelmed.

It is critical to note that the extraordinarily rapid onset and continually evolving nature of these fires created significant challenges for first responders and support staff in the scope, speed and quantity of services required to protect life safety and property.

F5. Sound judgment and extraordinary efforts by individual emergency responders reduced the risk of more serious loss in Santa Rosa.

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

F2. The emergency notification systems in use did not reach the most people in the quickest time.

We disagree partially with this finding.

The finding is ambiguous. The alert and warning systems in place at the time of the incident performed as designed. The relatively few number of residents subscribing to the SoCoAlert limited the number of residents contacted. As set forth in the CalOES independent assessment, the Wireless Emergency Alert System (WEA) was not used. The effectiveness of other warning systems were degraded by the loss of power, wireless data, and cell phone systems in the impacted areas. Public warning efforts were also significantly compromised by a lack of situational awareness which was almost impossible to achieve during the first critical hours of the incident.

In future events, the County will make use of the Wireless Alert System (WEA) to support emergency warning efforts for large incidents. This system was utilized on June 5, 2018 to notify residents of a dangerous industrial fire near Sonoma.

At its June 11, 2018 meeting, the Board of Supervisors reviewed an internal staff assessment of the county's alert and warning systems. The Board took action to develop and resource a comprehensive countywide community Alert & Warning Program. The program will have dedicated management and technical staff as well as support the use and integration of enhanced alert and warning technology and communications systems.

F4. Information flow from County Emergency Operations Center to City Emergency Operations Centers was not adequate in meeting the needs of City Emergency Operations Centers.

We disagree partially with this finding.

The finding assumes that information was available but simply not communicated to the cities. The nature of the event overwhelmed established communications procedures in both volume and pace. County staff will explore the potential for use of automated information systems in FY2018/2019. This subject will also be addressed in the revision of the County Emergency Operations Plan in FY2018/2019. As an intermediate step, a dedicated City liaison position has been established in the County EOC organization at the senior management level. The City Liaison represents the needs and interests of senior city officials, facilitates and expedites the exchange of situation awareness information, addresses allocation of critical resources and, as needed, directly connects city leadership with senior County EOC staff.

F6. The County Sheriff's Office and Santa Rosa Police Department were immersed in intense emergency actions which led to a lack of critical communication.

We disagree partially with this finding.

We agree that the County Sheriff's Office was immersed in intense emergency actions. Law enforcement's primary mission in the early stages of the fire was addressing immediate life safety threats and necessitated their prioritization of immediate evacuation assistance. The issue was not one of a lack of communications, but rather of accurate information to communicate given the overwhelming nature of the fires.

F7. Lack of strategic communication and information on evacuation routes and shelter sites led to increased risk and confusion.

We disagree wholly with this finding.

The finding assumes that government agencies had good situational awareness regarding the behavior of wildfires simultaneously in multiple locations as well as the conditions of the roadways in and out of each fire location. Additionally, most shelters were established by community organizations independently of government efforts. While more timely and accurate information would have mitigated some of the confusion experienced by residents, incidents with this level of dynamic severity will continue to present communications challenges to residents and responders alike.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R2. The County Administrator revise the County Emergency Operations Plan in collaboration with all City Managers to incorporate lessons learned from this emergency, by December 31, 2018. ((F1, F2, F3, F4, F6, F7)

Response: Recommendation R2 has not been implemented but will be implemented in the future.

County staff and stakeholder partners will revise the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) in FY2018/2019.