

READ AND CONSIDERED
DATE 1/20/26 BY Ch

DEPARTMENT GRAND JURY REPORT RESPONSE

Report Title: Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans
Are We Ready for the Next Major Evacuation?

Response by: Eddie Engram Title: Sheriff-Coroner

Agency/Department Name: Sheriff's Office

FINDINGS

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury determined that:

- F1. Sonoma County's Emergency Operations Plan, Hazard Mitigation Plan, and Department of Emergency Management are an excellent foundation for disaster preparation.
- F2. The County EOP is intended to be executed in an ad hoc manner without advance identification of specific evacuation routes or predesignated shelters.
- F3. Most of Sonoma County's major evacuation routes are incapable of accommodating predictable evacuation traffic in a timely manner.
- F4. Most roads critical to emergency evacuation in the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County have no remotely managed capability for controlling traffic flow, and existing traffic controls will not be operational during power failures.
- F5. The Sonoma County Sheriff's Office is primarily responsible for ensuring public safety during evacuations, but SCSO staffing may require temporary assignment of non-SCSO County employees for concurrent execution of household evacuation notices and evacuation route traffic management.
- F6. Organized community-based communications networks are a proven emergency resource yet remain only partly integrated into county and city emergency operations and communications infrastructures and require additional investment to provide county-wide coverage.

I (we) agree with the findings numbered:

F1, F3

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered:

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

F2- The Sheriff's Office partially agrees with this finding. The Sheriff's Office agrees that advance identification of specific evacuation routes do not exist. Based on experience, evacuation routes need to be identified based on the known impacts of a specific incident, real-time information, and coordination with the numerous agencies responding to the incident. The Department of Emergency Management is responsible for the EOP; therefore, the Sheriff's Office neither agrees nor disagrees with findings related to the EOP.

F4- The Sheriff's Office neither agrees nor disagrees with this finding as the Sheriff's Office does not operate traffic control systems.

F5- The Sonoma County Sheriff's Office agrees that the Sheriff's Office is primarily responsible for ensuring public safety during evacuations. However, the Sheriff's Office does not agree that temporary assignment of non-SCSO County employees should be used for concurrent execution of household evacuation notices and evacuation route traffic management. Law enforcement personnel are used during evacuations because of the extensive training sworn officers receive, which includes disaster-response training. In addition, during evacuation operations sworn personnel use vehicles equipped with emergency lights, sirens (hi-lo), and radios that allow for emergency communication and coordination with other first responding agencies.

If the Sheriff's Office does not have sufficient staffing for evacuations existing protocols are already in place to address the issue. The Office utilizes local mutual aid, providing personnel from the following agencies:

Local Law Enforcement Agencies

- Cloverdale Police Department
- Cotati Police Department
- Healdsburg Police Department
- Petaluma Police Department
- Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety
- Santa Rosa Junior College Police Department
- Santa Rosa Police Department
- Sebastopol Police Department

County of Sonoma Agencies with Sworn Personnel:

- Sonoma County Probation
- Sonoma County District Attorney's Office Investigators
- Sonoma County Welfare Fraud Investigators
- Sonoma County Public Defender's Office Investigators

State Law Enforcement Agencies with local field offices:

- California Highway Patrol

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Sonoma State Police Department
- California National Guard

Local Federal Law Enforcement Agencies and Taskforces

- DEA
- FBI
- NCRIC
- Homeland Security
- United States Coast Guard

If local mutual aid is insufficient, the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office utilizes out of county mutual aid through its designation under Region II (Alameda County) Law Enforcement Mutual Aid, coordinated by the Cal OES Law Enforcement Division. Cal OES expands the reach of mutual aid and access nationwide resources such as the National Guard (used during the Tubbs fire) if needed.

F6 – The Sheriff's Office partially agrees. Organized community-based communications networks are a proven emergency resource. However, any effort to expand GMRS or ACS coverage county-wide must be strategically planned and coordinated countywide to ensure integration of these systems do not potentially compromise the integrity of existing public safety communications.

When implementing community-based communications networks, their design must avoid interference or noise that could affect public safety radio systems used by first responders and other essential agencies. Careful planning is critical, particularly in the areas of frequency allocation and coordination, training protocols, and system interoperability.

Fully integrating community-based systems requires additional investment, structured development, policy alignment, and coordination with existing operations. Only through such efforts can community-based systems become resilient, countywide support networks that operate seamlessly alongside established communications infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. By December 5, 2026, the Board of Supervisors shall direct Sonoma Public Infrastructure to estimate and report the necessary cost and location of radio repeaters needed to fully implement GMRS repeaters serving the entire County.
- R2. The Board of Supervisors shall direct the Department of Emergency Management to report on the resources required to accelerate Emergency Operations Plan Annex Goals SE2 and SE5 from 2030 to 2027 by February 2, 2026, and shall evaluate this

resource requirement for inclusion in the 2027 County budget.

- R3. By July 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors shall fund Department of Emergency Management acquisition of evacuation management modeling and simulation software which will facilitate advance identification of zone-specific evacuation routes and evacuation messaging.
- R4. The Board of Supervisors shall direct the Department of Emergency Management to report on the resources required to identify and include within County Evacuation Maps the location of all predesignated county-operated evacuation shelters by March 2, 2026.
- R5. By July 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors and the Sonoma County Sheriff shall review Sonoma County evacuation plans to determine whether trained and certified Sonoma County employees (using the authority granted by California Government Code Gov. Code §§3100–3102) should become a resource for emergency traffic control operations.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §§ 933 and 933.05, the civil grand jury requires responses as follows:

- Sonoma County Board of Supervisors F1-F6, R1- R5
- Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management F1-4, F6; R2, R3, R4
- Sonoma County Public Infrastructure Department to respond to F1, F3, F4, F6; R1
- Sonoma County Sheriff to respond to F1-F6, R5

- **The following recommendation numbers have been implemented:**
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)

- **The following recommendation numbers have not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future:**
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)

- **The following recommendation numbers require further analysis:**
(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. *(This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.)*)

- The following recommendation numbers will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable:

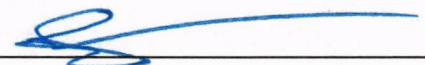
R-5

The Sonoma County Sheriff's Office does not believe it is reasonable to train and certify Sonoma County employees (using the authority granted by California Government Code Gov. Code §§3100–3102) to become a resource for emergency traffic control operations. Law enforcement personnel are used for traffic control for emergency road closures and in evacuation zones due to the extensive training that sworn officers receive, including disaster-response specific training.

Evacuated areas present significant public safety risks, including the potential for looting. Additionally, based on prior experience, emergency road closures and evacuation zones can become contentious when residents and/or motorists insist on accessing evacuated properties.

When the Sheriff's Office lacks sufficient staffing for emergency traffic control operations, existing protocols are in place to address the issue. These include local and regional mutual aid, as well as access to national assistance through the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) Law Enforcement Division.

Date: 07-24-2025

Signed: 

Number of pages attached: 5