



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: COUNTY MANAGER

File #: 19-909

Board Meeting Date: 9/24/2019

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Michael P. Callagy, County Manager

Subject: Board of Supervisors' Response to the 2018-2019 Civil Grand Jury Report, "Wildfire Risk and Response in San Mateo County"

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2018-2019 Civil Grand Jury Report, "Wildfire Risk and Response in San Mateo County."

BACKGROUND:

On July 9, 2019, the 2018-2019 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury issued a report titled "Wildfire Risk and Response in San Mateo County." The Board of Supervisors is required to submit comments on the findings and recommendations pertaining to the matters over which it has some decision-making authority within 90 days. The Board's response to the report is due to the Honorable Donald J. Ayoub no later than October 7, 2019.

DISCUSSION:

The Grand Jury made 13 findings and seven recommendations in its report. The Board responses follow each finding and the seven recommendations that the Grand Jury requested that the Board respond to within 90 days.

FINDINGS

Finding 1:

San Mateo County faces an increasing risk of loss of life and widespread property damage caused by wildfires.

Response:

Agree. With the changing climate, increasing temperatures, changing vegetation, and increased frequency of large damaging fires, San Mateo County faces an increased risk.

Finding 2:

The threats to life, property, and health from a wildfire extend beyond the Wildland Urban Interface in unincorporated San Mateo County and include areas east of Interstate 280.

Response:

Agree. Fire behavior throughout California has increased dramatically over the past several years, including burning into areas beyond the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), such as Coffey Park in Santa Rosa. Wind driven fires are casting embers miles ahead of the main fire into areas outside of the WUI.

Finding 3:

CAL FIRE and individual fire agencies have established mutual aid arrangements that increase the resources available to combat a wildfire in San Mateo County.

Response:

Agree. San Mateo County local government agencies have a robust boundary-drop agreement resulting in faster response times. Additionally, mutual threat zone agreements between local fire agencies and CAL FIRE result in additional wildfire resources dispatched quicker throughout the most vulnerable areas of the county.

Finding 4:

CAL FIRE and individual fire agencies have taken actions to reduce fuel loads in San Mateo County.

Response:

Agree. Actions are being taken by CAL FIRE, San Mateo County Fire Department and a variety of other agencies to reduce the fuel load in the county. Large vegetation management projects are taking place in Quarry Park and Kings Mountain Road.

Finding 5:

Approximately 89% of county residents have not subscribed to the SMC Alert emergency notification system.

Response:

The Office of the Sheriff submitted a response to this Finding directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

Finding 6:

California Senate Bill 821 will enable the County to include residents in SMC Alert unless they choose to opt out of that notification system.

Response:

The Office of the Sheriff submitted a response to this Finding directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

Finding 7:

Emergency notification systems have vulnerabilities that may limit the communications received by residents during a wildfire.

Response:

The Office of the Sheriff submitted a response to this Finding directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

Finding 8:

The location and path of a wildfire influences the choice of safe evacuation routes and shelter

locations.

Response:

Agree. Every fire behaves differently depending on fuels, weather, and topography. This means that evacuation routes will differ depending on the location, weather, and type of vegetation burning.

Finding 9:

When a fire is nearby, fire officials in San Mateo County recommend leaving a threatened area *before* an evacuation is ordered.

Response:

Agree. The public should not wait for an official evacuation order to leave, especially if they can see the fire. Anyone who needs additional time to evacuate should also leave as soon as possible. When in doubt, public “self-evacuation” is highly encouraged.

Finding 10:

Most County and city emergency officials prefer to withhold notification of specific evacuation routes and shelters until an emergency is in progress.

Response:

The Office of the Sheriff submitted a response to this Finding directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

Finding 11:

CAL FIRE and the California OES recommend that residents include information on potential evacuation routes in a household emergency preparedness kit.

Response:

Agree. Every household should have a plan for evacuation routes, including more than one way out.

Finding 12:

County residents in only four communities (La Honda, Palomar Park, Portola Valley, and Woodside), containing less than two percent of the county population, have received information about alternative emergency evacuation routes and shelter sites in advance of an actual emergency.

Response:

Disagree. Additional formal evacuation plan mailers have been developed and sent to residents in the communities of Kings Mountain and El Granada.

Finding 13:

The County Tax Collector’s Office is able to include a one-page guide to emergency preparedness with County property tax bills periodically.

Response:

The Treasurer and Tax-Collector submitted a response to this Finding directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

In order to expand the number of county residents receiving emergency notifications, the San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services should use the contact information of utility companies within six months of receiving guidance on implementing SB 821 from the California Office of Emergency Services.

Response:

The Office of the Sheriff submitted a response to this Recommendation directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

Recommendation 2:

The San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services should use utility contact information to distribute information on emergency response plans in advance of an emergency to the extent permitted under SB 821.

Response:

The Office of the Sheriff submitted a response to this Recommendation directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

Recommendation 3:

The San Mateo County Fire Department, working with individual fire agencies, should develop fire preparedness brochures that include maps of *alternative* evacuation routes from their respective communities (similar to the example in Appendix B) by June 30, 2020.

Response:

Agree. In 2018 two additional wildfire evacuation plan mailers were developed and sent to residents in the communities of Kings Mountain and El Granada. These plans showed evacuation routes as well as ways to prepare for wildfire. Additionally, San Mateo County Fire Department is currently leading a county-wide Standardized Evacuation Zone's project to ensure that all areas of the county can more quickly be evacuated.

Recommendation 4:

The San Mateo County Fire Department should produce a website containing the brochures recommended in R3 by June 30, 2020.

Response:

Agree. In June 2018 San Mateo County Fire Department's Six-Year Plan was adopted, which includes continued expansion of the San Mateo County Fire Department website in 2020. Evacuation plans will be included in this updated website.

Recommendation 5:

Periodically, beginning July 2020, the San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services should distribute emergency plans including links to maps with alternative evacuation routes with property tax bills.

Response:

The Office of the Sheriff and Treasurer and Tax-Collector submitted a response to this Recommendation directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

Recommendation 6:

The County Tax Collector should include a one-page insert on emergency response to a wildfire with property tax bills periodically, beginning July 2020.

Response:

The Treasurer and Tax-Collector submitted a response to this Recommendation directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

Recommendation 7:

The San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services should explore the possibility of providing advance information on alternative evacuation routes in a visual online format, such as the “crisis maps” feature in Google by June 30, 2020.

Response:

The Office of the Sheriff submitted a response to this Recommendation directly to the Civil Grand Jury.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no Net County Cost associated with accepting this report.