

2023 RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Efficiency, Oversight & Trust

Report Date: 07/10/2023

Response by: W. Honsal, Sheriff, County of Humboldt

FINDINGS

F9: Disagree

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. None

Date: 9/5/2023

Signed: W. Honsal

Number of pages attached: 2

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSE SUMMARY STATEMENT

FINDINGS:

***Finding 9:** We could find no evidence that the Disaster Council has met since the adoption of the Humboldt County Emergency Operation Plan in 2015, leading to no guidance for updating emergency planning, coordination, or response.*

Response: Disagree

Unfortunately, I couldn't locate the documentation relating to the last time the Disaster Council Met to the Grand Jury during their fact-finding phase. However, following the publication of the Grand Jury report, my OES team discovered that there was documentation indicating that the Disaster Council last convened on May 25, 2018. In the years since that meeting, there have been numerous transitions in executive and managerial staff that previously comprised the Disaster Council membership. Additionally, near-consecutive emergency activations in Humboldt County have led to the cessation of these meetings.

During emergency activations, an Office of Emergency Services Policy Group is typically established to offer input, recommendations, and guidance on the county's response, effectively carrying out the functions that the Disaster Council fulfills in the absence of an emergency. Policy Group meetings occurred regularly in 2020 and 2021, providing policy and administrative guidance for the county's response to COVID-19, and in 2022, in response to the winter storm incidents and the December 2022 Ferndale Earthquake.

The Humboldt County Code establishes control over the Office of Emergency Services with the Office of the Sheriff. County Code 2210-7 empowers the Director of Emergency Services (Sheriff) to manage and direct the efforts of the emergency organization within the County to achieve the objectives of this ordinance. Additionally, the Director is authorized to represent the County in all interactions with public or private agencies concerning emergency matters. The Deputy Director (Undersheriff) provides assistance to the Director as required and assumes the Director's responsibilities in their absence.

The OES practice and policy designates the Sheriff and Undersheriff as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Disaster Council by default. However, the biannual meetings have not been scheduled since 2018 due to the occurrence of nearly consecutive emergencies, ongoing recovery efforts, changes in crucial Council positions, and complications stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The process of revising the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) has been underway, with my OES team actively working on the revisions since July 2021. OES Manager, Ryan Derby and this staff of 2, have been diligently working to fulfill all of our state mandated reports, emergency preparedness, emergency response, and recovery. Progress on reworking the EOP has encountered delays due to numerous high-profile emergency activations, including the COVID-

19 Pandemic, the Late 2021 Winter Storm, the 2022 Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai Eruption, followed by a tsunami advisory across Coastal California, the Knob Fire, Six Rivers Lightning Complex, the 2022 December Ferndale Earthquake, the 2022-2023 Early Winter Storms, and the 2023 February-April Storms.

During emergency activations, the Office of Emergency Services staff (3 FTE) are expected to shift their focus from non-mandated day-to-day services to response operations. An updated or rewritten draft of the EOP is anticipated to be distributed for initial review in late 2024. It's important to note that the Emergency Operations Plan is not intended to serve as a step-by-step response manual; rather, it establishes the overarching structure for implementing an emergency response.

The 2015 plan has not resulted in uncoordinated or delayed response actions, nor has it impacted the public's ability to receive incident-related information. The series of emergencies that have taken place in Humboldt County over the past several years have demonstrated the efficacy of the structure outlined in the 2015 plan. These incidents have also offered emergency management personnel valuable insights for improvements to be incorporated into the upcoming version of the plan.