PROPOSED

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY RESPONSE TO THE 2024 SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

(Verbatim Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations are in italics)

FINDING F-1
The County's ability to respond quickly and provide relief to the citizens trapped by the heavy snowfall was hampered by a lack of proper equipment to remove the amount of snow encountered.

The County agrees with this finding. However, the extraordinary and unprecedented snowfall far exceeded historical patterns and reasonable expectations for storm response preparedness. Prior to this event, there had been no indication that taxpayer investment in the type and quantity of equipment necessary to rapidly remove such an extreme accumulation of snow was warranted.

RECOMMENDATION R-1
The Grand Jury recommends that the County create and maintain a plan for securing the use of the type of equipment required to clear accumulations of snow greater than 8 feet from vital mountain roads.

The County fulfilled this recommendation prior to the publishing of the Grand Jury's Final Report. Immediately after the February-March 2023 snow event, the County took swift action to enhance its snow removal capabilities by securing additional specialized equipment to manage extreme conditions to clear accumulations of snow great than 8 feet and equip operators with specialized training to optimize performance. The County has invested in more than 30 new pieces of heavy machinery, including loaders and blowers, bringing the County's machinery pool to more than 100 machines. The expanded fleet is strategically staged across the county to allow for immediate mobilization to affected areas. This approach enables the County to promptly clear roads, ensuring emergency vehicles can access impacted communities and residents can evacuate safely when necessary.

FINDING F-2
The Mountain residents were not well informed of the situation that they faced, and the efforts being taken to provide the necessary assistance.

The County partially disagrees with this finding. Once the County activated its public communications resources, the County carried out a robust public communications campaign consisting of daily e-mail newsletters and dozens of videos and social media posts focused on the efforts to meet the needs of mountain residents.

RECOMMENDATION R-2
That the County develop a plan to take a leading role in disseminating accurate and timely information to residents facing disasters over a broad spectrum of platforms including social media.

The County fulfilled this recommendation prior to the publishing of the Grand Jury's Final Report. During and immediately after the February-March 2023 snow event, the County established an

emergency response public information system involving the activation of public communications staff from all County departments to work under the direction of the Chief Communications Officer and the Director of the Office of Emergency Services (OES). The staff includes County photographers, videographers, graphic artists, and social media managers and is activated at the direction of OES. Activation includes the establishment of a virtual Joint Information System (JIS) headquartered at OES as a means of keeping the County's public information staff connected and on-task throughout the duration of an emergency.

The County also developed and launched the Preparedness Starts Here public information campaign and website as an intensely publicized one-stop resource for residents to obtain preparedness information on various types of disasters as well as specific information on current, ongoing emergencies.

San Bernardino County is committed to ensuring residents receive accurate and timely information during disasters. OES's goals include leveraging multiple communication channels such as the County's website, social media platforms, local radio and TV broadcasts, and emergency alert systems such as the immediate use of a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA), which overrides all functions of a person's cell phone to deliver warnings of danger to life or property, as well as the subscription-based Telephone Emergency Notification System (TENS). Furthermore, County agencies are in discussions to implement next steps for providing residents with real-time information through an application platform and the use of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) using AM radio stations. Residents are encouraged to sign up for emergency alerts and follow official County sources to stay informed and prepared.

To further strengthen public communication and ensure timely and accurate information during emergencies, the County has taken the following steps:

1. Increased TENS Subscriptions:
    - OES has significantly increased the number of residents subscribing to TENS. This system remains a critical tool for reaching residents quickly during emergencies.
2. Developing a Public-Facing Alert and Warning System:
    - OES is working closely with the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District and the Sheriff's Department to identify and implement a real-time public alert system that provides immediate, accessible information to all residents, regardless of subscription status. This system aims to ensure broader access to life-saving updates.
3. Enhancing additional resources for alerting:
    - Steps are being taken to implement upgrades to the SB Ready App, a key public-facing resource for emergency information. Planned enhancements include easy-to-use preparedness tools, links to mitigation pages for hardening homes against extreme weather, improved user interface, and expanded functionality to meet the diverse needs of residents during crises. OES is also working to enhance the AM EAS, by working closely with the stations, upgrading the remote alerting capability,

and providing NOAA radios to residents who have limited access to WEA's due to their location from cell towers i.e. mountain/canyon residents.

These initiatives demonstrate the County's ongoing commitment to enhancing emergency communications and ensuring residents are well-informed and prepared during disasters. By leveraging multiple platforms and integrating new technologies, the County is proactively working to address gaps and provide accessible, real-time information to all residents.

FINDING F-3

Since the agencies were not trained to understand the County Emergency Operations plan, they were poorly coordinated causing the community to suffer delays in needed services.

The County agrees with the finding and has implemented measures to address this concern.

RECOMMENDATION R-3

The Office of Emergency Services should develop a plan and accompanying training for all county departments, including the Board of Supervisors, to function according to the San Bernardino County Emergency Operations Plan.

The County fulfilled this recommendation prior to the publication of the Grand Jury's Final Report. OES is committed to ensuring that all County departments, the Board of Supervisors, and local elected officials are well-prepared to function effectively during emergencies, in alignment with the County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

1. Departmental Emergency Operations Plan (DEOP) Initiative:
    - Each County department is required to maintain a DEOP, which serves as a foundational guide for department-specific emergency responsibilities.
    - Departments are mandated to:
        - Review and update their DEOP annually.
        - Conduct training based on the DEOP to ensure all staff are familiar with their roles during emergencies.
        - Obtain director sign-off on the DEOP, confirming leadership accountability and readiness.
    - This process also establishes a roster of Department Emergency Contacts (DECs) who are responsible for coordinating their department's involvement in the broader County EOP review and update.
2. Enhanced Training for Elected Officials and Leadership:
    - OES has scheduled Elected Officials Training for the Board of Supervisors, local elected officials, and executive leadership through the California State Training Institute (CSTI). This training ensures that decision-makers understand their critical roles during emergencies and are equipped to provide effective leadership and coordination.
3. Regular Training and Exercises:
    - OES conducts regular training sessions, workshops, and simulation exercises tailored to the roles and responsibilities outlined in the EOP. These trainings cover key areas such as:
        - Emergency coordination and unified command.
        - Resource management and operational decision-making.

        - Communication strategies to ensure timely and accurate information sharing.
4. Continuous EOP Review and Updates:
    - As noted above, County OES performs periodic reviews and updates of the EOP using various stakeholders including DECs, non-governmental organizations, and supporting responders to incorporate lessons learned from past incidents, align with state and federal guidelines, and adopt best practices. This process will ensure that the EOP remains a dynamic and effective tool for guiding emergency response efforts.

By integrating the DEOP initiative, enhancing leadership training, and maintaining a robust EOP review process, the County has significantly strengthened its emergency preparedness framework. These efforts ensure that all stakeholders, from departmental staff to elected officials, are aligned and ready to respond effectively to any emergency scenario.

FINDING F-4
The Lack of a Disaster Council made up of county dept. leaders, hinders effective emergency planning, training, and communications.

The County agrees with this finding.

RECOMMENDATION R-4
Establish a Disaster Council per the San Bernardino County Emergency Operations Plan.

OES is actively working towards reestablishing the San Bernardino County Disaster Council to enhance coordination and ensure a unified, efficient approach to disaster and emergency management. This initiative aims to strengthen coordination among agencies, improve preparedness, and streamline response efforts to better serve the community during emergencies.

FINDING F-5
The San Bernardino County Emergency Operations Plan has not been updated since 2019 and the plan does not cover a snow event like the county had in 2023.

The County agrees with this finding.

RECOMMENDATION R-5
Update the County Emergency Operations Plan to include a plan to deal with a unique winter snowstorm and other unusual events. ***And*** *Require all County departments perform and record an annual review of the County Emergency Operations Plan.*

The County has taken significant steps to implement this recommendation.

1. Evaluation and Gap Analysis:
    - OES has engaged a contractor to thoroughly evaluate the current EOP and perform a gap analysis to identify annexes that require updates or need to be newly drafted. This ensures that the EOP remains comprehensive, actionable, and aligned with best practices.

2. Enhanced Staffing and Expertise:
    - OES has strengthened its capacity by onboarding two new specialized staff members:
        - A Training Emergency Services Officer (ESO) to design and deliver targeted training programs.
        - A Planning ESO, tasked with leading updates to the EOP and annexes and coordinating with departments to ensure alignment.
3. EOP Review and Training Process:
    - OES is establishing a process that will require all departments to join in multi-departmental review of the EOP and its Annexes in accordance to the State of California's Integrated Preparedness Plan (IPP). This process serves as the mechanism to review each Annex (i.e. earthquake, flooding, mass care and sheltering, etc.) and update in real time as needed. It will also serve to record on-going reviews of the EOP to ensure it remains current, relevant, and effective. This review will be tracked and documented to ensure compliance with the County's emergency preparedness standards.
    - In parallel a comprehensive training plan will be developed in accordance the IPP process to exercise to each EOP Annex as it is reviewed. This plan will:
        - Include regular workshops, scenario-based exercises, and simulations to reinforce understanding and operational readiness.
4. Simultaneous Training Initiatives:
    - To complement the EOP review, OES is creating customized training programs for the Board of Supervisors and Operational Area cities and towns to provide County stakeholders with practical tools and actionable knowledge for effective emergency response and coordination as noted in a prior response.

These initiatives reflect the County's commitment to improving EOP understanding, enhancing interdepartmental coordination, and ensuring timely and effective services during emergencies. By investing in evaluation, planning, and training, the County is building a more resilient and capable response framework for the future.

FINDING F-6
After the County's Emergency Proclamation, the formation of the EOC, and the state's Emergency Declaration, OES and some agencies were hesitant to fully function in unified command.

The County agrees with this finding.

RECOMMENDATION R-6a
OES and the County's CEO negotiate Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) for resources likely to be included in future emergencies.

The San Bernardino County Department of Public Works annually hires seasonal employees to supplement its regular staff as equipment operators. In addition, the department has developed an on-call list of local contractors with equipment who are under contract and can be activated as needs arise. A seasonal maintenance yard in Running Springs is also activated and staffed when inclement weather is expected.

OES has begun a review of the current MoU's to establish a gap analysis and next steps. This includes Non-Governmental Organization's, military, and any other strategic need that is identified.

RECOMMENDATION R-6b

Department Heads of County agencies be formally trained on their responsibilities during an emergency, both before and after a county Emergency Proclamation.

The County fulfilled this recommendation prior to the publication of the Grand Jury's Final Report. OES is committed to ensuring that all County departments are well-prepared to function effectively during emergencies in alignment with the County EOP.

1. Training Programs for Department Heads:
    - OES provides regular training sessions, workshops, and simulation exercises tailored to the specific roles and responsibilities of Department Heads as outlined in the EOP.
    - These trainings focus on emergency coordination, resource management, decision-making processes, and communication strategies to ensure Department Heads are equipped to lead their agencies effectively during emergencies.
2. Using Real-World Incidents for Training:
    - OES utilized the various significant incidents of 2024 to work closely with each Department Head to review their roles and responsibilities. Lessons learned from these events have been incorporated into day-to-day practices to enhance readiness for future incidents.
3. OES Coordination Calls:
    - During the 2024 incidents/emergencies, OES conducted Coordination Calls to bring leadership together in real-time to:
        - Share available resources.
        - Identify emerging needs.
        - Establish unified preparedness postures.
    - This process fosters a "one team, one response" approach, ensuring that County leadership operates cohesively to manage incidents effectively.
4. After-Action Meetings and Reports:
    - After every Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation, OES holds After-Action Meetings with all participants to evaluate performance and identify areas for improvement.
    - These discussions result in After-Action Reports (AARs), which capture lessons learned, best practices, and recommendations for refining procedures. These reports inform periodic updates to the EOP, ensuring continuous improvement and preparedness.
5. Ongoing EOP Review and Improvement:

- OES conducts regular reviews and updates of the EOP to integrate evolving best practices, incorporate feedback from training sessions, and address insights gained from past incidents.

By implementing these measures, OES ensures that Department Heads are not only trained but also actively engaged in a continuous cycle of preparation, response, and improvement. This comprehensive approach equips County leadership with the knowledge and tools needed to respond to emergencies with confidence, efficiency, and unity.

FINDING F-7

The EOC did not have a functioning unified command, resulting in County resources not being used effectively.

The County agrees with this finding.

RECOMMENDATION R-7

Department heads be trained in EOC responsibilities and held accountable for their agency's participation in the EOC.

The County fulfilled this recommendation prior to the publishing of the Grand Jury's Final Report. OES is committed to establishing a Unified Command with Fire and Sheriff primarily, and any other County departments as dictated by the incident. We have implemented the steps below to train towards effective command and control during emergencies in alignment with the EOP.

1. Collaborative Training for Unified Command:
    - OES, the Fire Department, and the Sheriff's Department conduct regular joint training sessions at various levels to ensure a unified command structure is established and ready whenever the EOC is activated. These joint exercises focus on:
        - Strengthening cross-agency communication.
        - Clarifying roles and responsibilities in unified command.
        - Enhancing coordination during real-world incidents.
2. Integrated Operations Section in the EOC:
    - Steps have been taken to work closely with both the Fire Branch and the Law Branch within the Operations Section of the EOC. This ensures that, even during lower-level activations, there is a clear understanding of unified command and seamless coordination across agencies to support field operations.
3. Embedded Fire Chief at OES:
    - To further enhance collaboration and information flow, a Fire Division Chief has been embedded within OES. This role ensures:
        - Real-time communication between OES and fire command.
        - Streamlined decision-making during emergencies.
        - Unified strategy development for operational readiness and response.
4. Ongoing Training and Best Practices:
    - OES continues to provide regular training sessions, workshops, and simulation exercises tailored to the roles outlined in the EOP. These efforts focus on:
        - Emergency coordination and resource management.
        - Decision-making processes for leadership and staff.

        - Integration of lessons learned from past incidents to improve unified command structures.
    - OES participates in drills, exercises, and trainings offered by its command and control partners to strengthen communication.
    - OES has initiated the practice of embedding an Emergency Services Officer at Incident Command Posts, even when the EOC is not activated, to further strengthen coordinated support.
5. Continuous EOP Updates:
    - OES conducts periodic reviews and updates of the EOP to reflect best practices, incorporate feedback from joint exercises, and ensure alignment with state and federal guidelines.

These initiatives ensure that the County's emergency management framework fosters seamless collaboration, strengthens the unified command structure, and enhances the efficiency of emergency response efforts. By embedding cross-agency coordination at all levels, the County is better prepared to address and manage complex emergencies effectively.