

## **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: HOW READY IS ALAMEDA COUNTY?**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The history of California is in large part a history of its disasters. Earthquakes are frequent and often destructive; catastrophic wildfires are a constant threat; and there are floods, landslides, even volcanic eruptions and tsunamis. Alameda County has seen more than its share of these, including the 1923 Berkeley hills fire that destroyed over 600 structures, and the 1991 Oakland firestorm that destroyed 2,843 houses and killed 25 people. Even as this report is being written, the county and the world are confronting the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). The future looks no more promising than the past: with the advent of climate change, wildfires are predicted to be more frequent and destructive; and the Hayward Fault Zone, which lies under six cities in Alameda County, is overdue for what might be a catastrophic earthquake.

The California State Emergency Plan was created to prepare for such disasters and directs cities, counties, and other agencies to create their own individual emergency operations plans following state and federal guidelines. The purpose of these plans is to respond to emergencies, reduce loss of lives and property, and to recover from catastrophic events.

In order to assess the efforts being made in Alameda County to prepare for disasters, the grand jury investigated how the 14 cities in the county and the county itself comply with the emergency planning directive. Our intent was to investigate whether these jurisdictions have emergency plans in place as well as their readiness to implement their plans. We sought information from all jurisdictions within Alameda County inquiring about the readiness of their various emergency operation plans, emergency operations centers, regular exercises, employee training, follow-up reports (also known as after-action reports), and related preparations.

The responses, most of which were received in early December 2019, indicated a wide range of achievement. All the jurisdictions have emergency operations plans but only a handful have designated lines of succession for their elected officials in the case of an emergency or have trained these officials in disaster preparedness. The county of Alameda and the city of Berkeley are far ahead of the others in the number of exercises conducted and the training of employees and officials. Other cities admitted that they would be overwhelmed in the case of a major disaster and would be relying on the county for leadership and aid.

## BACKGROUND

The disasters that have struck California during its history have been many and varied: the 1906 earthquake and fire that devastated San Francisco; the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989 that destroyed freeways and buildings; the 1918 influenza pandemic; countless wildfires; and the floods that regularly swell rivers and flood valleys. Perhaps less well known was the tsunami that occurred after the 1964 Alaska earthquake that killed 12 people and destroyed 30 blocks in Crescent City, California; the volcanic eruptions of Mount Lassen from 1914 to 1917; and the Great Flood of 1862, when the equivalent of 10 feet of precipitation fell over several weeks, submerging the Central Valley in up to 30 feet of water and covering an area 300 miles long and 20 miles wide.

*The grand jury undertook this investigation in order to determine just how well-prepared local jurisdictions are to respond to disasters.*

Several things inspired the grand jury to look at how local jurisdictions are prepared for future emergencies and disasters. One was the recent fires in Northern California, which consisted of a series of devastating fires in Napa, Lake, Sonoma, Mendocino and Butte counties. The county of Sonoma prepared an after-action report and improvement plan, assessing the response of its various emergency services during the 2017 Complex fires. The report made numerous findings, noting confusion about the role of public officials, inadequate staffing of the emergency operations center, and insufficient training and exercise programs. One consequence of these wildfires was the initiation of a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) plan by PG&E, an attempt to preempt the possibility of fires caused by power lines and failing equipment by shutting off power to certain fire-prone areas when fire danger is high. These shutoffs in 2019 left many without electricity for days, and residents with medical needs were forced to find emergency shelters equipped to power their medical devices.

Another motivation for the grand jury's investigation was the 2018 U.S. Geological Survey report entitled "The HayWired Earthquake Scenario," which imagined a hypothetical magnitude 7.0 earthquake on the Hayward Fault. The predictions of the HayWired report were dire: 800 deaths, 18,000 non-fatal injuries, 77,000 households displaced, and up to 210 days without water service in some areas in Alameda County.

Finally, in early 2020, the coronavirus threat brought home to all of us how quickly an emergency can arise, and how dramatically it can change our lives. Store shelves are empty and emergency rooms are overwhelmed, and the need for supplies and accurate information becomes a matter of life or death. The United States Department of Health and Human Services conducted exercises from January to August of 2019, code-named "Crimson Contagion," that simulated an influenza pandemic that started in China and spread throughout the world, ultimately sickening

110 million Americans with 7.7 million hospitalized and 586,000 dead. An unreleased draft report of the exercise’s findings concluded that there was insufficient funding for a response to the pandemic, confusion regarding the roles of various federal agencies, and a lack of production capacity for protective equipment and medical devices.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the surveyed cities and the county activated their emergency operations centers or participated in daily conference calls in order to obtain information or provide resources to the Alameda County Public Health Department, the city of Berkeley Public Health Division, hospitals, and local first responders.

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### Emergency or Disaster

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines an *emergency* as any incident, whether natural, technological, or human-caused that requires responsive action to protect life or property. A *disaster* is an occurrence of a natural catastrophe, technological accident, or human-caused event resulting in injuries, deaths, or severe property damage.

When an *emergency* occurs, a local jurisdiction may be able to handle that emergency event with its own resources (staffing, supplies, facilities, expertise, funding, etc.) and will not seek federal or state assistance. When a *disaster* occurs, a local jurisdiction will not have the resources available to respond or recover from the event. In such cases, a local jurisdiction will have to rely on mutual aid and support from other local, county, state or federal agencies, or from private businesses.

### The California State Emergency Plan, SEMS, and NIMS

In 1970, the state enacted the California Emergency Services Act which established the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES). Cal OES is responsible for the coordination of statewide emergency preparedness, post-emergency recovery and mitigation efforts, and for the development of emergency plans.

Central to this are the requirements of California’s Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and the federal National Incident Management System (NIMS). SEMS sets out the requirements for emergency preparation in California, and local government entities must use SEMS in order to be eligible for any reimbursement of costs under the state’s disaster assistance programs. NIMS has similar requirements for coordinating the efforts of the various entities in disasters anywhere in the United States. It is important to recognize that compliance

with SEMS and NIMS is also necessary in order to receive state and federal funding, respectively, for preparedness and expenses incurred responding to disasters.

### Emergency Operations Centers

An emergency operations center is a centralized location for emergency management coordination and decision-making by a city, county or other public entity during a critical incident or disaster. The mission of an emergency operations center is to support field responders, collect and disseminate information, track and order resources, and coordinate response and recovery efforts.

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Emergency centers are staffed by personnel from multiple departments including police, fire, planning, public works, and health. It is vital that personnel assigned to these centers receive training and regular exercises to keep their skills up-to-date and allow them to function effectively when the center is activated in an emergency. The state of California maintains and operates the state operations center and three regional emergency operations centers.

When an emergency or disaster occurs or has the potential to occur, Cal OES can activate the state center and affected regional centers to support the operational area where the emergency is taking place. An operational area is simply a county and its political subdivisions, such as cities, utility districts, etc. Alameda County is the operational area coordinator responsible for all jurisdictions within the county, including the 14 cities and all unincorporated areas. A description of its emergency operations center can be found later in this report.

### Local Governments

The California Emergency Services Act states “counties, cities and counties, and cities may create disaster councils by ordinance. A disaster council shall develop plans for meeting any condition constituting a local emergency or state of emergency, including but not limited to, earthquakes, natural or manmade disasters....” While creating a disaster council is optional, once it is created an emergency operations plan is mandatory. All the cities in Alameda County and the county itself have created these councils; therefore, all are required to have emergency plans. During an emergency, local governments implement their plans, which may include deploying emergency response personnel, activating emergency operations centers, and issuing orders to protect the public.

## INVESTIGATION

In order to assess the state of preparedness of the cities and county of Alameda, the grand jury selected eight assessment criteria that we believed would indicate a jurisdiction's state of readiness:

1. The existence and latest date of its emergency operations plan.
2. Emergency operations center exercises that have taken place during the previous two years.
3. Emergency operations center activations that have taken place during the previous two years.
4. Emergency operations center training that have taken place during the previous two years.
5. After-action reports pertaining to the above.
6. Designation of standby officers.
7. Elected officials training.
8. Direct line of succession for the director of emergency services.

The grand jury reached out to the county of Alameda and the 14 cities in the county requesting this information in November of 2019 and received responses in December from all but one of the jurisdictions, with Oakland responding in February 2020.

### Emergency Operations Plans

To help local governments prepare their own emergency operations plans, Cal OES prepared a checklist of emergency plan elements referred to as a “crosswalk,” which is designed to ensure that the requirements of SEMS and NIMS are met. These requirements include an overview of the steps taken to prepare for disasters; an emergency organization chart; communication protocols; the organization and operation of the emergency operations centers; a description of the persons who would succeed key government officials; the submission of after-action reports; and a description of the necessary training and exercise programs. Local plans should address response activities that are specific to all hazards that pose a threat to the jurisdiction, such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and terrorism. It should also name a director of emergency services and identify successors to that director.

For its part, FEMA also publishes a guide on developing and maintaining emergency operations plans. This guide provides background and resources for creating plans and recommends that each component of the plans be reviewed and revised regularly, at a minimum of every two years. The grand jury took this two-year recommendation as a basis for our investigation and in framing our questions to the cities and county.

The grand jury found that all jurisdictions in Alameda County have existing emergency operations plans. The cities of Dublin, Piedmont, San Leandro, and Hayward, along with Alameda County, are either in the process of updating their emergency operations plans or should take steps to update their plans, as they may be outdated.

- Alameda County adopted its plan in 2012 and is projected to update its plan in 2020.
- The city of Dublin adopted its plan in 2004 and is projected to update its plan in 2020.
- The city of Hayward does not state when its plan was drafted.
- The city of Piedmont adopted its plan in 2015 and is planning to update it in 2020.
- The city of San Leandro adopted their plan in 2015 and is in the process of updating it with no specific timeline.

### Emergency Operations Exercises

Emergency exercises are important in order to test capabilities, familiarize personnel with roles and responsibilities, and establish interaction and communication with other organizations. Exercises can also bring together and strengthen the whole community to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from all hazards.

Two types of exercises are used for emergency center training:

- 1) Discussion-based exercises are tabletop simulations, seminars, or workshops. They are used to familiarize participants with plans and procedures.
- 2) Operations-based exercises are drills, which can be either functional or full-scale. These test plans, policies, agreements and procedures, clarify roles and responsibilities, and identify resource gaps in an operational environment.

There are three types of operations-based exercises:

- *Drills*: A coordinated, supervised activity usually employed to test a single, specific operation or function within a single entity, such as a fire department conducting a decontamination drill.
- *Functional Exercises*: These exercises examine the coordination, command, and control between various multi-agency centers such as an emergency operation center or a joint field office. A functional exercise does not involve first responders or emergency officials responding to an incident in real time but does allow participants to physically run through elements of the response to become familiar with it.
- *Full-Scale Exercises*: A multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline exercise involving both emergency operations centers and rehearsed emergency responses (e.g., multiple departments in the field doing live activities and communicating results and resource needs to their emergency operation centers).

Many of the exercises, especially if funded by federal grants, are required to be conducted in accordance with FEMA’s Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program. In order for a jurisdiction to be considered compliant with these principles it must conduct annual training and exercises, submit after-action reports, and take corrective actions.

The grand jury found that the cities of Alameda, Hayward, Newark, Piedmont, San Leandro and Union City performed no emergency training exercises within the last two years. Other cities, including Albany, Emeryville, and Pleasanton only performed tabletop exercises. The city of Berkeley conducted the most exercises (27), both functional and tabletop, and the county of Alameda conducted 18 exercises, both functional and tabletop. It should be noted some exercises included numerous jurisdictions. Notably, the Urban Shield multi-jurisdictional exercises conducted in September of 2018 included a full-scale earthquake and other emergency scenarios. Participants included Cal OES, various state departments, the county of Alameda, and five of the 14 cities in the county: Berkeley, Dublin, Fremont, Livermore, and Oakland. It should be noted, however, that funding for these exercises, provided by the Department of Homeland Security, was lost when the county board of supervisors ignored warnings of the Alameda County Sheriff’s Office and set conditions in its application that were unacceptable to the grant funders.<sup>1</sup>

Other exercises, such as “The Great Shakeout,” the “Big Wave” (for tsunamis), and “Mass Care” (to deal with the care of the displaced) were also attended by a number of cities. The Alameda County Public Health Department sponsored two exercises anticipating an emerging infectious disease outbreak: a tabletop exercise in October of 2018 and a functional exercise in November 2018. The purpose was to understand individual and coordinated response roles for the public health department and other local agencies and healthcare providers. Participants included various county agencies including the department of emergency services and a large number of healthcare providers, including Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Health, and a number of assisted and senior care centers. The only city to participate was Berkeley, which alone among the cities in Alameda County has its own public health agency. As we have seen with the coronavirus pandemic, the public response to the outbreak (such as ordering citizens to shelter-in-place) was made at the county level by the county public health department, as well as by the city of Berkeley public health office.

The after-action reports for both of these outbreak exercises found strengths and areas in need of improvement and recommended further free FEMA courses for healthcare providers. The grand jury recommends that these exercises be repeated on a regular basis and after-action reports be prepared to assess the readiness of what would be a wide-ranging collection of healthcare providers responding to an outbreak.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Alameda County Grand Jury did an investigation into the loss of this funding in its 2018-2019 report: “County Mismanagement Loses Millions for Terrorism and Disaster Training.”*

## Emergency Operations Center Activation

Activation of an emergency operations center occurs when an emergency or civic event requires a response or monitoring. Such activation gives the jurisdiction a chance to test the system and see its capabilities and the need for any changes.

The level of activation is determined by the director of emergency services in consultation with field responders or emergency management staff. There are three levels of activation:

- Full activation (Level One) involves a full activation of all organizational elements likely requiring help from the state or Federal government, such as a major earthquake resulting in significant damage.
- Partial activation (Level Two) is for emergencies or planned events requiring greater staffing, such as during PG&E’s planned power outages in 2019. Representatives from other jurisdictions may be requested to assist or provide mutual aid in some aspects of a partial activation.
- Minimum activation (Level Three) is for situations which initially require minimal staffing, e.g., alerts of anticipated storms or tsunamis; or monitoring of a low-risk planned event such as a parade.

No jurisdiction in Alameda County had a full activation of its operations centers during the last two years. Ten jurisdictions conducted partial activations and two conducted minimal activations.

Three cities, Emeryville, Newark, and Piedmont have not performed any activations at any level over the last two years, again because there were no emergencies that triggered them. This emphasizes the need for training and exercises, specifically functional and full-scale exercises for emergency centers and staff.

However, in 2020, Alameda County and Berkeley initiated a full activation to deal with the COVID-19 crisis to support their public health officers and departments. For the other jurisdictions, some had partial activations to support the care and sheltering operations. All agencies, special districts, and other state and federal agencies participated in a daily conference call with the public health officers and Alameda County Office of Emergency Services.

## Emergency Operation Training Courses

Cal OES states that training, tests, and exercises are essential to ensure that officials, emergency responders, and the public are operationally ready, and recommends that personnel with emergency responsibilities complete courses described by SEMS and NIMS. Cal OES provides courses for emergency managers and first responders. Some of these courses are available online

for free. Advanced courses are available through FEMA’s Emergency Management Institute, Bay Area Urban Area Security Initiative, and the California Specialized Training Institute.

The following agencies were identified as having participated in limited training in SEMS or NIMS in the last two years:

- Hayward had one training on violent intruder response in 2017 and one all-hazards incident leadership class in 2018.
- Oakland had two training sessions on mass care and sheltering in 2019.

### Grant Funding and Support for Training and Exercises

The grand jury recognizes that disaster preparedness programs require financial resources and staff support to plan, develop, and implement. All jurisdictions have limited resources and each jurisdiction should take advantage of grant opportunities to enhance their emergency operations training and exercises. For example, in 2018 some of the Alameda County jurisdictions participated in the Urban Shield training that provided a rare opportunity to test the care and sheltering plans and emergency operations centers in the county. Examples of available grants that could assist each local agency include:

- Emergency Management Grant
- Urban Area Security Initiative Grant (as noted above, the county has lost this funding)
- State Homeland Security Program
- Homeland Security National Training Program
- Hazard Mitigation Grant

### After-Action Reports

California regulations require that an after-action report be completed whenever the local agency has declared a state of emergency. These reports should make recommendations for correcting problems discovered during a response/recovery effort, or during exercises and training. The Sonoma County Complex Fires report is a good example of this. After a comprehensive review of the fires, the response by emergency personnel, and an overview of the emergency operations center organization, the report made 68 detailed findings and 55 recommendations ranging from changes to the operation of the emergency centers, to increased training and preparation, to clarification of roles of elected officials.

The grand jury found that not all entities in Alameda County provided documentation for the lessons learned from their exercises or Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activations. Six cities reported completing no reports at all despite numerous activations and exercises. Only the city of Emeryville provided after-action reports and improvement plans for all their exercises.

The grand jury strongly recommends that all jurisdictions prepare after-action reports and corrective action plans. Templates for after-action and improvement plans are available from FEMA’s Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program website.

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>EOP Plan Date</b>	<b>EOC Exercises</b>	<b>EOC Activation</b>	<b>After-Action Reports (AAR)</b>	<b>EOC Training</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Alameda City	2019	4 notification drills	Several partial and monitoring	<b>None</b>	Yes	Notification drills for city staff.
Alameda County	2012	18 exercises, functional and tabletop	3 partial	Yes	26 Sessions	EOP will be updated in 2020; no AAR for partial activations; participated in 2018 statewide infectious disease functional exercise. Coordinated 2018 Urban Shield.
Albany	2018	1 tabletop; drill	3 partial	Yes	Yes	EOC monitor status for PGE shutoff (PSPS) and civic events.
Berkeley	2016	27 exercises functional and tabletop	5 partial and 3 monitoring	Yes	39 EOC training sessions	Participated in 2018 statewide infectious disease functional exercise and Urban Shield. Conducted drills and training for the health and public works departments.
Dublin	2004	2 functional 1 tabletop	2 partial and 1 monitoring	<b>None</b>	Yes	EOP to be updated 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2020. Participated in 2018 Urban Shield.
Emeryville	2014	4 tabletop	<b>None</b>	Yes	Yes	Established a disaster reserve fund of \$3.45 million
Fremont	2020	1 tabletop, 1 functional	2 partial and 1 “virtual”	Yes	Yes	One EOC communications training class in 2019, 12 classes from 2017–2018; Urban Shield.
Hayward	Un-dated	<b>None</b>	2 partial	Yes	Notes	Several exercises in 2016; training in violent intruder and all hazard incident leadership
Livermore	2018	2 tabletop, 1 full scale	10 partial	<b>None</b>	Yes	All employees required taking NIMS and SEMS training. Assigned staff receives advanced EOC training annually. 2018 Urban Shield.

**Table 1, Continued: Responses Regarding Emergency Operations Plans (EOP),  
Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Activations,  
Training and Exercises  
2018–2019**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>EOPP Plan Date</b>	<b>EOC Exercises</b>	<b>EOC Activation</b>	<b>After-Action Reports (AAR)</b>	<b>EOC Training</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Newark	2013	None	None	None	Yes	
Oakland	2012	1 functional	6 partial	None	Yes	Activation for PG&E PSPS, 2 civic activities; AAR for PG&E PSPS in development. 2018 Urban Shield.
Piedmont	2015	None	None	None	Yes	EOP to be updated in 2020. One EOC training class for all employees.
Pleasanton	2018	3 tabletop	2 partial	Yes	Yes	
San Leandro	2015	3 drills	2 partial	Yes	Yes	EOP in process of update; AAR for one drill. Drop, Cover and Hold and Evacuation drills.
Union City	2014	1 tabletop	1 partial	None	Yes	Activation for cyber outage and PG&E PSPS

Standby Officers

Standby officers are officials designated to fill the post of any member of a governing body who is unavailable during a state of emergency. Such standby officers would serve either until the elected members return or until the next election. Although not mandatory by state law, it is prudent and a best practice to appoint standby officers for each member of a governing body in Alameda County before a disaster occurs to ensure continuity of government and representation of the electorate during a crisis. Having no standby officers means that should the regular members of the governing body be unable to fulfill their duties during an emergency (e.g., incapacitated during a pandemic, injured or burned out of their homes) there would be no one to take their places during that emergency.

In Alameda County, the cities of Berkeley and Emeryville have adopted resolutions designating standby officers for their elected governing bodies. The city of San Leandro identifies standby officers by assignment to specific commissions according to the elected official’s date of appointment. San Leandro should modify their designated standby officer list to be specific to the individual councilmember in succeeding order. All other jurisdictions including the cities of Alameda, Albany, Dublin, Fremont, Hayward, Livermore, Oakland, Piedmont, Pleasanton,

Union City, and Alameda County should adopt resolutions designating up to three standby officers for each member of the governing body in succeeding order.

### Elected Official Training

To effectively deal with an emergency and for the proper management of an emergency operations center, it is important to have the governing body and standby officers trained in advance of a disaster. They will be better informed when making funding decisions related to stockpiling essential supplies (e.g., gloves, masks, ventilators), and they will know which experts to rely on when making emergency decisions such as closing schools and public areas. During any crisis, they will have the responsibility to communicate with the public. Inconsistent or false information can complicate relief efforts. As we have seen during the recent COVID-19 crisis, a slow response or misinformation by public officials can cause dangerous delays and even loss of life.

*The grand jury found that eight cities have not had emergency training for their elected officials during the past two years.*

FEMA and the state of California offer free training for elected officials. The Sonoma County Complex Fires report noted that “elected officials were not effectively integrated into the emergency management organization and emergency operations center functions” and recommended developing an elected official’s disaster handbook, along with training specifically for elected officials.

Given the turnover in elected officials, it is likely that numerous officials have had no training at all and would presumably not know what actions to take in a disaster.

### Director of Emergency Services Line of Succession

A line of succession for the director of emergency services needs to be identified in the emergency operations plans. The California Emergency Services Act recommends that a line of succession of three persons be identified in succeeding order to ensure a designated person can provide direction should the director be unavailable. Without a line of succession for the director of emergency services, the emergency operations center staff could be left leaderless. The grand jury recommends that since Dublin, San Leandro, and Union City do not have established lists for their directors of emergency services identified in their emergency operations plans, they need to identify alternates. Albany identifies the line of succession as the “police chief or fire chief” but this should be amended to designate a specific line of succession for alternates. Hayward lists only one alternate (fire chief) to succeed the city manager, and the city should therefore modify their emergency operations plan to identify three individuals in succeeding order.

**Table 2: Responses regarding Standby Officer List, Elected Official Training, and Director of Emergency Services Lines of Succession**

Jurisdiction	Standby Officers	Elected Officials Training	Director Line of Succession	Notes
Alameda City	No	No	Yes	Succession plan for mayor only.
Alameda County	No	Yes	Yes	
Albany	No	Yes	Yes	Line of Succession is not in specific order for Director of Emergency Services (Police <i>or</i> Fire Chief)
Berkeley	Yes	February 2018	Yes	
Dublin	No	April 2018 and April 2019	No	
Emeryville	Yes	2015	Yes	City Council training scheduled for 2020
Fremont	No	Yes	Yes	Standby Officers to be addressed in Spring of 2020
Hayward	No	No	Yes	Only 1 Director alternate – Fire Chief
Livermore	No	Yes	Yes	Elected officials required to take SEMS training
Newark	No	No	Yes	
Oakland	No	No	Yes	
Piedmont	No	No	Yes	
Pleasanton	No	No	Yes	
San Leandro	Yes	No	No	Lists standby officers using commission; need to modify
Union City	No	No	No	

### Alameda County Emergency Operations Center

The grand jury visited the Alameda County Emergency Operations Center in February of 2020 to see what is in place to be activated in the event of an emergency or disaster requiring an immediate response.

The Alameda County Sheriff's Office operates the center in Dublin, California. Created in 1996, the center maintains a two-hour response capability. The center consists of a central operations room with tiers of desks, phones, and computers for such stakeholders as Cal OES, public works, volunteer organizations (such as the Red Cross), and PG&E (which also has its own emergency center). The center also has a wall of TVs showing news, weather, and other strategic information. This room is surrounded by other rooms dealing with such things as fire rescue, public works, social services, and logistics, as well as a media room that keeps track of ongoing public information such as TV news and social media. A radio dispatch center provides a backup radio system that may be used in an emergency. The center also has a backup power generator.

In addition to its standby status for emergencies, the county emergency center also conducts training and information sessions. According to the Alameda County Sheriff's Office, it is one of the busiest emergency centers in the state.



*Alameda County Emergency Operations Center*

The Alameda County Emergency Operations Center is important to local emergency and disaster response for two reasons. First, the county's center will coordinate with the state and regional emergency operations centers in responding to an emergency, as well as with other entities such as cities and water districts within its jurisdiction. Second, as noted by several of the smaller cities in their responses to the grand jury inquiry, a major disaster may overwhelm local emergency centers and responses, and those jurisdictions may rely heavily on the county for support and resources to respond to the emergency.

### Public Preparedness

The grand jury emphasizes the public's role in all emergency preparation, whatever the anticipated disaster. Residents play an important role in emergency management by ensuring they and their families are well-prepared. Before an emergency occurs, citizens can assist the emergency management effort by taking first aid, Ham radio or Community Emergency Response Team training, maintaining home emergency supplies, and being prepared to evacuate or shelter-in-place for several days or weeks.

During an emergency, citizens should monitor emergency communications by signing up for the Alameda County Emergency Alert Notification System (AC Alert) and carefully follow directions from authorities. By being prepared, citizens can better serve their families and communities and reduce demands on first responders. Many local government agencies, particularly county offices of emergency services, have individual, family, and community preparedness initiatives. California Volunteers is a state office that provides information and tools to support individual and community emergency planning and matches volunteers to opportunities.

Cities can also prepare their communities by creating community-based emergency scenarios. For example, the cities of Berkeley and Albany conducted a drill with residents in 2019 to develop and test their evacuation plans. The public health departments of Alameda County and Berkeley conducted mass vaccination and point-of-distribution drills simulating the delivery of supplies in the case of a pandemic event.

## CONCLUSION

We are all aware that disasters can happen, but most of us are unaware of how an emergency can affect our daily lives. Emergencies range in unpredictability and in the amount of time they allow us to prepare ourselves. We can see epidemics start overseas, develop into worldwide pandemics, and when it reaches our shores, we can only hope that the government is prepared to help us deal with it. We know that wildfires are endemic to our region, but we forget the speed with which they can move and that they can leap eight-lane freeways with ease and wipe out neighborhoods in minutes. And the earthquake that will wreak massive destruction, cause a large loss of life, and change our cities and our way of life for years, will be the last thing on anyone’s mind moments before it happens. Faced with these potential disasters, the one thing that can help us is preparation.

The jurisdiction that will have the greatest responsibility to deal with any disaster or emergency is the County of Alameda itself. As the operational area coordinator, they will have to support not only the unincorporated areas of the county, but also the 14 cities in the event of a regional disaster. Alameda County has a state-of-the-art emergency operations center and coordinates training programs that are attended by not just local cities, but also by water and utility districts, hospitals, and other stakeholders. Two cities—Emeryville and Newark—indicated they will likely be overwhelmed by any large disaster and intend to rely on the county in an emergency. In truth, major disasters will require all the jurisdictions to rely on the State and Federal government to provide resources and staff to respond to and recover from an emergency.



*Faced with these potential disasters, the one thing that can help us is preparation.*

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there had not been an emergency or disaster of sufficient magnitude in the last several years to require a full level activation of any local emergency operations center. Furthermore, as our investigation showed, three cities—Emeryville, Newark, and Piedmont—had no activations at all in the last two years. Eight cities conducted no training of their elected officials who will be called upon to make decisions in times of crisis. It is imperative that all jurisdictions hold frequent exercises and training, involving not just employees but also elected officials. Decisions that they make during their time in office must be informed by an understanding of what can happen when disaster strikes and what we must do to prepare for a major emergency.

Only two cities in Alameda County have designated standby officers, and while this is optional, it is an easy step to take. The emergency director line of succession is also easy to establish, and although only three cities failed here, one city was less than clear on the actual order of succession, and another city only had one alternate. Given the relative simplicity of these

matters, it is surprising that all the cities and the county have not designated emergency standby officers and a line of succession for their directors of emergency services.

The grand jury calls upon individual cities and the county to update emergency plans; conduct regular exercises; establish standby officers for elected officials; and create lines of succession for the directors of emergency services. In addition, the grand jury recommends that the cities and county make available online all emergency operations plans, after-action reports for activations and exercises, and other materials related to emergency preparation.

**FINDINGS:** *None*  
**RECOMMENDATIONS:** *None*  
**RESPONSES REQUIRED:** *None*

## REFERENCES

State of California Emergency Plan (2017) with Crosswalk (attachment D):

[https://www.caloes.ca.gov/PlanningPreparednessSite/Documents/California\\_State\\_Emergency\\_Plan\\_2017.pdf](https://www.caloes.ca.gov/PlanningPreparednessSite/Documents/California_State_Emergency_Plan_2017.pdf)

State of California Standardized Emergency Management System Regulations (SEMS):

<https://www.caloes.ca.gov/cal-oes-divisions/planning-preparedness/standardized-emergency-management-system>

California Emergency Services Act (Yellow Book):

<https://www.caloes.ca.gov/LegalAffairsSite/Documents/Cal%20OES%20Yellow%20Book.pdf>

National Incident Management System (NIMS):

<https://www.fema.gov/national-incident-management-system>

HayWired Report:

[https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2018/3016/fs20183016\\_.pdf](https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2018/3016/fs20183016_.pdf)

Sonoma County October 2017 Complex Fires After-Action Report:

<https://www.sonomacity.org/october-2017-fires-after-action-report/>

Complex Fire After-Action Report – Recommendations:

<https://srcity.org/DocumentCenter/View/24160/Tubbs-Nuns-Fire-After-Action-Review-Findings-and-Recommendations-Improvement-Plan>

2018 Sonoma County Grand Jury Report on the October Firestorm Emergency Response:

<http://sonoma.courts.ca.gov/sites/all/assets/pdfs/general-info/grand-jury/2017-2018/GrandJuryOctoberFireEmergencyReport6-05-18.pdf>

Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP):

<https://www.fema.gov/hseep>

California Volunteers:

<https://californiavolunteers.ca.gov/>