



Assessment Report

Emergency Management Program

Mendocino County Sheriff's Office



Office of Emergency Services
3-1-2021

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Scope

This report outlines a program assessment focused on the Mendocino County Office of Emergency Services. This assessment examines the emergency management function, organization, core capabilities and program weaknesses. The assessment was conducted over a twelve month timeframe by the Emergency Services Coordinator, Sheriff's Department staff, and subject matter experts from neighboring jurisdictions. The assessment team reviewed policies, procedures, after action reports, tools, and references throughout this assessment period. The team also engaged stakeholders, conducted observations during real world emergency response and recovery operations, and consulted previous OES program managers. The following outlines key findings as well as recommendations.

Introduction

Emergency management is the managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters. Emergency management seeks to promote safer, less vulnerable communities with the capacity to cope with hazards and disasters. Emergency Management protects communities by coordinating and integrating all activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the capability to mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from threatened or actual natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other man-made disasters¹.

Within a County, otherwise known as an Operational Area, the majority of emergency response and recovery activities are conducted throughout assorted county departments and agencies in coordination with local communities, stakeholder organizations, and private sector partnerships. Emergency management facilitates these relationships by acting as an extension of the executive function of local government.

Since inception during the Civil Defense era, emergency management has transitioned into "all-hazards" preparedness for increasingly complex emergency and disasters. The emergency management program has moved several times within Mendocino County over the past 40 years. Initially, the program was managed by the Mendocino Emergency Services Authority and then transitioned under the County's umbrella. County code placed the OES program under the Executives Office, however the program has historically lived within the Sheriff's Department. Elements of the emergency management program continue to move from one department to another as assigned by the Director of Emergency Services (County CEO) as priorities shift or staff shortages arise.

¹ training.fema.gov

Over the last 20 years due to an expansion in mission, role, organizational complexity, and program functions, emergency management as evolved. This has been driven by several factors:

1. With the implementation of California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) in 1995, the county-level emergency management program became the lead agency for developing and maintaining the Operational Area concept. The Operational Area consists of all the county, municipal, and local district governments inside the county's geographic borders. County staff directly serve those residents in unincorporated county areas while indirectly supporting the cities and special districts. The county program serves as the primary conduit to state and federal organizations - before and during a disaster².
2. Following 9/11, the federal government developed a tremendous body of regulation, policy, guidance, and practice (ex. the National Incident Management System). Initially intended to address the threat of major terrorism, these efforts have created many actual or implicit mandates and standards for how local government organizes and administers its emergency management function.
3. The large Homeland Security grants that also grew out of the post-9/11 initiatives have become increasingly complex to administer even as local governments grow more dependent upon them. In many ways, federal and state grant requirements drive priorities and program.
4. The increased level of knowledge, skill, and technical abilities required to conduct traditional emergency management preparedness activities such as planning, training and exercising has forced many emergency managers to specialize. It is not uncommon to have staff spend most of their career in just one focus area.
5. The effort to address the tactical level of emergency management (planning, etc.) often competes with needed policy level work. Emergency management staff are increasingly asked to support senior governance and policy programs including general plan development, infrastructure development, and post-disaster fiscal recovery. Emergency management staff must balance workloads to ensure they can exercise their roles as leaders in support of executive management.

The list of potential natural hazards and man-made threats has also expanded greatly in the last 20 years. The true probabilities of existing hazards such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, and wildfires are now being appreciated. The threat of terrorism and active-shooter incidents have challenged local communities like nothing before and have a higher likelihood of probability within rural jurisdictions. The effects of climate change are already producing demonstrable extreme weather effects including extreme peak rainfall intensity, potentially more significant wildland fire incidents, significant winter storms, increased extreme heat incidents, and coastal storm surge.

² California Emergency Services Act

Concurrently, public expectations for local government services before and after a disaster have also risen dramatically. Residents are increasingly reliant upon collective infrastructure, utility, transportation, and information systems. Disruptions to these physical systems and the corresponding tears in the social fabric are effectively outside the control of individuals. In a disaster, communities expect local government to respond as quickly and with the same capabilities as our institutions provide in our daily lives. These expectations continue to increase as residents flee low-threat expensive cities for more affordable high-risk rural communities.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the California Office of Emergency Services have begun urging local governments and communities to adopt a culture of preparedness. Local governments are being asked to increase preparedness resources, stand ready to address their own needs following a disaster, and not depend on rapid federal assistance.

Although commonly used for the last 60 years, term 'emergency services' is increasingly misleading as the emergency management function does not primarily provide services to the public. Nationally, the term 'emergency management' is now used to describe this function.

Key Findings

The Mendocino County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated for 93 days throughout this 12 month assessment. The Public Health Department Operations Center stood operational for the remainder of the year. During this time the Operational Area responded to a pandemic health disaster, two (2) federally declared fires, one (1) winter storm event, and several undeclared Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events. Additionally, one minor earthquake occurred within the City of Willits. These events demonstrate that it's essential to evaluate the past and present program performance, while planning for future demands that could strike at any time such as a tsunami, active shooter, or major earthquake.

Key findings include:

1. According to county code, the Mendocino County Office of Emergency Services is a function of the Executive's Office, however daily management of the program has been delegated to the Sheriff's Office. Assorted emergency management tasks are assigned across county departments by the Director of Emergency Services or her designee. Assigned tasks do not always align with the County's Emergency Operations Plan. The current mission of the Office is:
 - Manage daily activities associated with Emergency Management within the county

- Plan and coordinate response activities related to county-wide emergency and disasters
 - Serve as the primary coordination point of Emergency Management's communication flow between federal, state, and local partners
 - Develop emergency operations plans in support of the operational area
 - Manage the alert and warning program
 - Manage Federal emergency management grant programs
 - Conduct training and educational outreach programs related to emergency preparedness
 - Sponsor emergency management training
2. The Emergency Management program has historically been under resourced. A strategic plan was developed in 2010. Since then the staffing has ebbed and flowed. At times it has been staffed with inexperienced individuals or left unstaffed altogether. A similar observation was made in regards to the Public Health preparedness program, which complicated the COVID-19 response effort. OES position titles are not aligned with industry standards or those of counties with similar compositions. Program roles and responsibilities have been delegated to the Emergency Services Coordinator, however the authority to execute particular tasks reside within the Executive's Office. All OES program funding is dependent on grant funding. There is no formal OES staff professional development program or plan currently.
3. Emergency Management capabilities have been significantly impacted by repetitive annual wildfires, PSPS events, winter storms, and the pandemic response. Staff turnover, multiple simultaneous recovery efforts, and conflicting state and local priorities over the past 4 years have significantly degraded the Emergency Management capabilities. The current organizational structure within the Sheriff's Office has allowed the program to focus on response capabilities and is aligned with the industry standards within California. *See Attachment A – Alignment of California County Emergency Management Programs.*
4. There are no formal Joint Power Agreements (JPAs) or Memorandums of Agreements/Understanding (MOA/MOUs) between local jurisdictions. Formally, Mendocino County Code 7.04.080 establishes and defines the Disaster Council Powers and Duties (*See Attachment C: Mendocino County/Operational Area Emergency Council Membership*). The Council is the only formal outlined process that provides for coordinated input by stakeholders in the preparation, implementation, evaluation, and revision of the program. The Disaster Council has not met in several years. Alternatively, designated executive staff attend City Manager's Meetings. Two cities within the Operational Area have designated the City Manager as the Emergency Manager, however OES is not represented at the City Manager's Meeting. The fire chiefs also hold a quarterly meeting which is attended by law, fire, and two members of the Board of Supervisors. OES is represented at the Fire Chief's Meeting.

5. The Emergency Management Program does not have administrative and financial procedures for use before, during, and after a disaster. Fiscal support has transitioned between the Executive's Office and the Sheriff's Office based on staffing and program alignment. Management of grant programs has shifted between OES, the Executive's Office, and Health and Human Resources. OES currently administers various Homeland Security grants in support of the Operational Area. During 2020/2021 these included the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP), The Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) and the Emergency Management Performance Grant Supplemental (EMPG-S). These vary in funding each year and the division manages multiple fiscal year allocations of each grant at any given time. Annually, OES sees approximately \$320,000 – \$500,000 in funding move through the division. Due to staff turnover and limited fiscal support, the division has been forced to request numerous grant extensions and may have to de-obligate funding due to administrative challenges associated with purchasing.
6. Personnel are appointed by directives correctly within the Sheriff's Department. The Emergency Management Program's authorities and responsibilities are established within county codes, but execution of these responsibilities is completed by assorted personnel as assigned by various executive office staff.
7. Hazard Mitigation Planning (HMP) has been grant-funded, completed by a contractor, and facilitated by multiple departments over the past decade. Most recently, the project was led by a contracted recovery director assigned to assist Planning and Building Services. Previously, the HMP was led by the Department of Transportation. Internally, OES participates with regional partners to conduct Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments due to limited staffing availabilities. Priority of mitigation projects and risk reduction planning are performed within the Executive's Office.
8. The Emergency Management Program has a process to coordinate prevention activities and monitor potential threats in partnership with various response partners. The program manages multiple means in which to exchange information among internal and external stakeholders.
9. Mendocino County maintains a range of response plans across assorted departments and disciplines. The Emergency Operation Plan (EOP), a required core planning document, is currently outdated. The Executive's Office has expressed interest in executing an MOU with the Sheriff's Office in order to outline program roles and responsibilities. Industry standards are that an update to the EOP and county codes is required and would be more appropriate. The county does not have a recovery plan/framework. A recovery outlined was developed during the Oak/August Complex Fire response, but not implemented. Departments maintain Continuity of Operations Plans (COOPs) and the Assistant CEO maintains accountability annually. There is no other coordinated program associate with COOP and no Continuity of Government (COG) plan.

10. SEMS and ICS principles are in place to facilitate Incident Management by field personnel. Unfortunately, OES has no capacity to support developing incidents in the field when staffed with only one full-time employee (1 FTE). Grants management, alert and warning, basic planning efforts, coordination, and training and/or exercise requirements monopolize more time than what is allocated. Field response capabilities would require no less than 2.5 experienced FTEs.
11. Due to the size of the organization, Mendocino County utilizes ICS/NIMS resource management systems in accordance with field standards before, during, and after an emergency. Donations management is supported by local nonprofits. Spontaneous volunteer management and the coordination of unaffiliated volunteers has been a significant challenge over the past 12 months.
12. The ability to provide mutual aid or coordinate support to various regions of the Operational Area is limited to discipline specific mutual aid agreements. During the past three fire seasons, residents in most unincorporated areas receive support from the closest jurisdiction for resources or information. Periodically, politics trump policy, protocols, and procedures which results in significant response inefficiencies and individual hardships for residents.
13. The backbone of any response relies on communication, which can be challenging in a large and rugged rural county such as Mendocino. The county strives to fund communication infrastructure improvements, maintains assorted communication equipment, and continuously updates plans and procedures. Internally, communication is informal with the use of phone trees and dependent on commercial utility resources. Field units utilize a wide variety of UHF and VHF radios. Both have access to satellite communication services. Externally, the county utilizes assorted mass notification systems such as Nixle and Everbridge Electronic Notification Systems (ENS). ENS are also dependent on commercial utility resources, however Mendocino County Sheriff has also employed various siren systems and other field expedient notification processes. OES has developed a draft Mass Notification Plan in accordance with SB 833 and coordinates an Alert and Warning Subcommittee to continually adopt best practices. Training standards, policies, procedures, protocols, message templates, and plan maintenance requirements are outlined within the document.
14. The industry standard is that the Emergency Management programs have primary and alternate facilities identified for conducting Emergency Management activities. A former strategic plan conducted in 2010 identified the lack of adequate facilities as a significant shortcoming. At that time, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was located at the Sheriff's Training Building within the Donavon Room. The space was then found to be insufficient during the 2017 Mendocino County Complex Fires and subsequent disasters. The OES Director allocated space in a building adjacent to dispatch and the main administration building. Although, this program element has been delegated to a deputy CEO to

manage. Neither OES nor Sheriff Department staff are permitted to access the building unless escorted by CEO staff. The site has several deficiencies such as, but not limited to, no emergency generation, no physical hardening, no alternate communication assets, etc. Additionally, the call center is not co-located with the EOC and, over the past year, has been relocated five times during assorted emergencies. Alternate EOC sites have been identified within the Emergency Operations Plan. Alternate sites consist of partner agency dispatch centers throughout the Operational Area, which are insufficient as they would not support prolonged operations in the event of a large event such as a fire or earthquake. There are no activation procedures or manuals for primary or alternate sites. As a result, staff have developed and conducted an EOC facilities assessment. See *Attachment D – EOC Facilities Assessment*.

15. The county attempts to support the state's EOC credentialing plan, however the requirements are extremely difficult to meet for rural jurisdictions given the limited access to state training opportunities and the fact that Mendocino County does not have access to regional training opportunities. The county does not have a formal EOC Staff Development Plan. There are no mandatory training participation requirements. Disaster Service Worker (DSW) awareness training is limited to new employee orientation and the program's relation to county employees. Prior to COVID-19, new employees received a four-hour Emergency Management training, however the new employee orientation agenda has since been restructured. FEMA Independent Studies courses are assigned to new employees and tracked within the county's Human Resource Training Application (Target Solutions). It is unclear how other training documentation is tracked across departments and Operational Area partners.
16. Mendocino County OES maintains a Multi-Year Exercise and Evaluation Plan. Currently, the plan is limited due to staffing turnover, operational demands, and is lacking leadership commitment. Planning, execution, and corrective actions are developed in accordance with HSEEP standards.
17. Public information before, during, and after a disaster is essential to public safety and hazard mitigation. Although public information is a function of the Executive's Office within the current Emergency Operation Plan, this function is executed by the Sheriff's Office throughout the response phase. Preparedness information is disorganized and can be found on assorted county department pages. Public information reference potential threats is not readily available. Public information efforts transition back to the Executive's Office as the response efforts end and the operations shifts into recovery. There are no formal Public Information Plans, processes, or procedures. Message development and delivery require approval by various Executive's Office staff and the OES Director/County Executive.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Commit: Build a sustainable and effective Emergency Management and preparedness programs in support of local jurisdictions and residents.
2. Resource: Dedicate facilities, funding, and staff to support Emergency Management functions on par or greater to industry standards.
3. Manage: Determine proper organizational alignment, update county codes, and annotate department roles and responsibilities within a revised Emergency Operations Plan.
4. Evaluate: Incorporate performance measures/accomplishments of Emergency Management roles and responsibilities into department annual CEO Report for BoS review.
5. Planning: Conduct a complete inventory of plans, maintenance planning, and establish planning standards. Add initial (draft) IAP to each response plan as an attachment.
6. Planning: Revitalize OES strategic plan and conduct annual maintenance.

Recommendations

Due to the extensive nature of this assessment, a running list of improvement items has been developed and is maintained by OES. This Improvement Plan (IP) guides the program's work plan over time, gets reviewed by the Disaster Council, and is periodically adjusted based on Operational Area priorities.

[See Mendocino County OES Program Assessment Improvement Plan]

Attachment A: Alignment of California County Emergency Management Programs

	SHERIFF OFFICE	FIRE DEPART	CAO/CEO	INDEPENDENT DEPART	HUMAN SERVICES DEPART	PUBLIC HEALTH DEPART	BOARD OF SUPERVISORS	PUBLIC WORKS DEPART	GENERAL SERVICES DEPART
<i>NUMBER OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS ALIGNED UNDER EACH DISCIPLINE ACROSS 58 CALIFORNIA COUNTIES</i>	22	8	12 ³	9	3	1	1	1	1

³ According to County Code Sec 7.04.040 Mendocino County OES is aligned under the County Executive's Office.

Attachment B: Emergency Management Program Capabilities Assessment Summary

The chart below summarizes the multi-agency assessment of the County's current emergency management program capabilities. These categories are aligned with the categories identified by the International Association of Emergency Manager's (IAEM) Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP).

PROGRAM AND ELEMENTS		RATING
1. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM		
1.1.	PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND EVALUATION	
1.2.	COORDINATION	
1.3.	ADVISORY COMMITTEE	
1.4.	ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE	
1.5.	LAWS AND AUTHORITIES	
2. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ELEMENTS		
2.1.	HAZARD IDENTIFICATION, RISK ASSESSMENT AND CONSEQUENCE ANALYSIS	
2.2.	HAZARD MITIGATION	
2.3.	PREVENTION	
2.4.	OPERATIONAL PLANNING AND PROCEDURES	
2.5.	INCIDENT MANAGEMENT	
2.6.	RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, MUTUAL AID, AND LOGISTICS	
2.7.	COMMUNICATIONS AND WARNING	
2.8.	FACILITIES	
2.9.	TRAINING	
2.10.	EXERCISES, EVALUATIONS, AND CORRECTIVE ACTIONS	
2.11.	EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION	

Fully Capable	Minor Deficiencies	Major Deficiencies	Not Capable
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Attachment C: Mendocino County/Operational Area Emergency Council Membership

Mendocino County Code 7.04.080 defines the Disaster Council Powers and Duties. According to county code 7.04.070 the Disaster Council consists of the following:

- A. The Director of Emergency Services, who shall serve as chair.
- B. The Assistant Director of Emergency Services, who shall serve as vice-chair.
- C. The Emergency Services Coordinator, who shall serve as secretary.
- D. Police Chiefs of the incorporated cities of Fort Bragg, Ukiah and Willits.
- E. City Managers of the incorporated cities of Fort Bragg, Point Arena, Ukiah and Willits (or their designee).
- F. The County Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinator.
- G. One (1) Fire Chief selected by the Mendocino County Fire Chief's Association.
- H. The County Public Health Director.
- I. A member of the Mendocino County Office of Education.
- J. The County Board of Supervisors may appoint such representatives of civic, business, labor, veterans, professional, or other organizations having an official emergency responsibility.

Attachment D: Emergency Operation Center Facility Evaluation

[See Emergency Operation Center Facility Evaluation]

Mendocino County EOC Facility Evaluation

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Background

The following checklist was developed to assist Mendocino County OES in performing the initial evaluation of the hazards, vulnerabilities, and resultant risk to their existing Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The evaluation is based on State and Federal guidance. The questions have an operations focus and are intended to address whether a requirement for a particular capability exists, whether the EOC can provide that capability, and whether the provided capability is adequate. The checklist¹ first asks questions about the physical features of a facility housing an EOC or Alternate EOC, and then addresses the characteristics of facility Features, Survivability, Security, Sustainability, and Interoperability. Descriptions of each characteristic can be found in the table below.

Table 1: Facility Characteristic Descriptions

Section	Description
Features	Examines the physical features of EOC facilities: sitting, structure, available space. EOC spaces to consider are an operations area, conference rooms, communications center, secure communications room, and multi-use space. Multi-use space is space that is not dedicated to EOC operations, but can quickly be made available to support EOC requirements for additional space during major disaster or surge situations.
Survivability	Sustain the effects of a realized potential risk and continue operations from the EOC or a fully-capable alternate location; (e.g., have an alternate EOC that can be activated and used if the primary is destroyed, damaged, or not accessible).

¹ The checklist/assessment is a guide and is not intended to be all-inclusive. In conducting the initial assessment, other concerns or issues that may not have been included in the checklist have been noted as a comment at the end of the assessment.