

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans
Are We Ready for the Next Major Evacuation?

Report Date: June 12, 2025

Response by: Johannes Hoevertsz Title: Director

Agency/Department Name: Sonoma Public Infrastructure

FINDINGS:

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F1, F4

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F3, F6

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed with an explanation of the reasons.)

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury determined that:

F3. Most of Sonoma County's major evacuation routes are incapable of accommodating predictable evacuation traffic in a timely manner.

Sonoma County Public Infrastructure partially disagrees with this finding.

The County has demonstrated the capacity to evacuate effectively through coordinated planning, early warning, and adaptive traffic management, such as during the 2019 Kincade Fire. The success of mass evacuations is reliant on several factors, including road design, early alert systems, timely public response, and dynamic traffic operations. This challenge is faced by all jurisdictions in California, as no transportation network is designed to fully support large-scale, last-minute evacuations.

Many Sonoma County roads, especially in hilly rural areas, are narrow and winding due to topography and standards during the periods in which they were constructed. These characteristics present inherent limitations when moving large volumes of traffic rapidly during emergencies.

To address network limitations, the Department of Emergency Management collaborates with communities in unincorporated areas for evacuation exercises. These exercises help community members become familiar with the evacuation process, along with several routes out of their neighborhood. Community evacuation exercises have taken place since 2019, with previous

communities including Cavedale, Grove Street/Diamond A, Mill Creek, Fitch Mountain, Sea Ranch, Occidental, and Palomino.

F6. Organized community-based communications networks are a proven emergency resource yet remain only partly integrated into county and city emergency operations and communications infrastructures and require additional investment to provide county-wide coverage.

Sonoma County Public Infrastructure partially agrees with this finding.

We recognize that non-traditional communications networks, such as General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS), Radio Amateur Communications Service (RACES) and Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS) are essential complements to conventional communication systems that increase reach and provide redundancy in times of emergency.

The County is actively involved in implementing and expanding these low-cost, high-impact communication platforms, which have already proven their value during events such as the 2023 floods and severe winter storms.

The County's ACS program has over 60 volunteers, along with an amateur radio repeater system and a non-repeater system to communicate locally, regionally, statewide, nationally, and worldwide. ACS has a net control station within the county's Emergency Operations Center with access to all amateur radio frequencies for FCC-licensed technicians, general, and extra-class licenses, along with equipment to support emergency communication to Sacramento to Cal OES's ACS/RACES radio room. The County's ACS program maintains relationships to provide emergency radio support at fire stations, law enforcement stations, hospitals, EMS stations, command posts, emergency shelters, along with other critical locations as needed.

Finally, the County, in collaboration with ACS and our community's GMRS radio operators, developed a concept of operations for integrating ACS operators and GMRS operators in net control and message handling between the two radio systems. Future collaborations between ACS and GMRS are in progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Recommendations numbered: R1_____ have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered: N/A_____ have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered: N/A _____ require(s) further analysis.

(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. ***This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.***)

- Recommendations numbered: N/A _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

R1. By December 5, 2026, the Board of Supervisors shall direct Sonoma Public Infrastructure to estimate and report the necessary cost and location of radio repeaters needed to fully implement GMRS repeaters serving the entire County.

Sonoma Public Infrastructure has conducted a preliminary evaluation and estimates that approximately \$750,000 to \$1.5 million would be required to install GMRS radio repeaters capable of providing reliable coverage across the majority, if not all, of Sonoma County.

The most significant challenges to achieving full coverage are found in the West County and certain parts of the East County, where complex terrain and limited line-of-sight reception hinder radio signal propagation. Despite these geographic constraints, the department believes that, with strategic repeater placement, the estimated investment would support a robust and effective countywide GMRS repeater network.

Date: _____ Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: 0 _____

(See attached PC Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)