

Response to Grand Jury Report Form
Report Title: Warming Centers
Department of Health Services

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Report Date: June 18, 2023
Response by: Tina Rivera Title: Director
Agency/Department Name: Sonoma County Department of Health Services

FINDINGS:

F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F11, F12, F13

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F3, F4, F6, F7, F9

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F5, F8, F10, F11, F12, F13

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

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1, R2

- Recommendations numbered: R1, R2 have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered: _____ have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered: _____ 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: _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: 8/04/2023

Signed: 

Number of pages attached:

(See attached PC Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)

Revised June 2022

Response to GJ Report Form

Recommendation R1 – Summary describing the implemented actions.

Extreme Temperature Annex was developed by Department of Emergency Management and presented to the Board of Supervisors on June 11, 2023. The annex is divided into seven key areas,

Concept of Operations

Response Phases

Notifications

Public Health Alerts

Public Information

Support Centers

Roles & Responsibilities

The Extreme Temperature Response Annex outlines the policies, procedures, and area partners' roles in response to an extreme temperature incident. Local city jurisdictions can and do detail their own criteria for response to an extreme temperature incident, the County's annex provides criteria for implementing our strategy to unincorporated areas of Sonoma County and positions the County as the Operational Area to prioritize the support of pre-established facilities and the expansion of warming or cooling services and establish additional facilities if necessary. This Extreme Temperature annex uses a three-phase approach to extreme-temperature incidents. Pre-determined actions and responses have been established for each phase to ensure an effective and timely response. The three phases are based on the risk and impact to vulnerable populations and the general population. The three phases are: Readiness, Cold/Heat Alert, and Cold/Freeze/Heat Warning. Implementation criteria for each phase's extreme temperature-related activities is based on information including historical data, predicted outlook data, best practices from the region, and input from the County Health Officer as well as the National Weather Service.

Recommendation R2 – Summary describing the implemented actions.

With respect to declaring an extreme weather event the following actions are considered: The Sonoma County Operational Area uses a three- phase approach to extreme-temperature incidents. Pre-determined actions and responses have been established for each phase to ensure an effective and timely response.

Phase I: Readiness

Phase II: Cold/Heat Alert

Phase III: Cold/Freeze/Heat Warning

When an extreme temperature incident is projected, an extreme temperature County coordination meeting is called by the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) Duty Officer. This internal call brings together Department of Health Services (DHS), DHS Public Health Preparedness Unit, DHS Health Officer, DHS Ending Homelessness, DHS Emergency Medical Services – Coastal Valley, County Administrator Office of Communications, Human Services Department (HSD), HSD In Home Supportive Services, and Sonoma County Public Infrastructure. The goal of the coordination call is to start our planning efforts, coordination of county efforts, develop a common operating picture, and identify gaps.

Phase I readiness actions are taken when the National Weather Service issues a partner email or delivers an operational area briefing that indicates an extreme temperature incident is possible (or that temperatures may meet implementation criteria in the **next 7 days**).

Implementation Criteria

An NWS Partner email issues, or situational briefing includes:

- Hot weather threshold indicators
 - Temperature forecasts with number of heat days
 - Overnight recovery temperatures
 - HeatRisk tool forecast
 - Forecast areas affected

- Cold weather threshold indicators
 - Temperature forecast with the number of cold/freezing days
 - Daytime recovery temperatures
 - Accompanying hazardous conditions (rain preceding/following cold temperatures, flash flood watch/warning potentials, wind chills or extreme temperature fluctuations)
 - Forecast areas affected

Phase II is activated when DHS and DEM determine that an extreme temperature incident is likely to occur **within 24 hours or is occurring**, based on an assessment of extreme temperature indicators. During a Phase 2 DEM will activate our Department's Operations Center

Implementation Criteria- Heat

A single or combination of the below conditions may prompt activation of this phase:

- NWS HeatRisk Level of Level 3 or greater for at least 3 consecutive days **and**;
- NWS issuance of Excessive Heat Warning and/or;
- Forecast high daytime temperatures are accompanied with overnight low temperature of at least 75°F or higher and/or;
- CAISO issues an Energy Emergency Alert 2 or 3 electrical emergency or is implementing Energy Emergency Alert 3- Firm Load Interruption rotating outages concurrent to the extreme heat incident and includes a significant portion of Sonoma County and/or;
- Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) declares PSPS Warning for outage incidents and/or;
- Unanticipated power outages are occurring affecting a significant number of customers and/or;

- Increase in EMS calls for service and/or emergency room visits compared to the average number for the 7-day period prior and/or;
- Department of Health Services issues a Health Emergency related to Heat and/or a Public Health Order related to Heat

Implementation Criteria - Cold

A single or combination of the below conditions may prompt activation of this phase:

- Forecast overnight temperatures are expected to drop below 28 degrees, and conditions are projected for a minimum of 2 consecutive days, or;
- Forecast overnight temperatures are expected to drop below 32 degrees, and conditions are projected for a minimum of 3 consecutive days, or;
- Forecast temperatures to drop below an average nighttime low of 37 degrees for two consecutive days with accompanying hazardous conditions (e.g., greater than 1" rain, predicted snowfall, flash flood watch/warning, wind chills or extreme temperature fluctuations) **and**;
- National Weather Service (NWS) issues cold-related Warnings (Freeze, Cold, Frost, etc.) and/or;
- Forecast overnight low temperatures are accompanied with daytime temperatures of 40°F or lower and/or;
- Unanticipated power outages are occurring affecting a significant number of customers and/or;
- Department of Health Services issues a Health Emergency related to Cold and/or a Public Health Order related to Cold

Phase 3 Implementation Criteria- Heat

A single or combination of the below conditions may prompt activation of this phase:

- NWS HeatRisk Level of Level 3 or greater for at least 3 consecutive days **and**;
- NWS issuance of Excessive Heat Warning and/or;
- Forecast high daytime temperatures are accompanied with overnight low temperature of at least 75°F or higher and/or;
- CAISO issues an Energy Emergency Alert 2 or 3 electrical emergency or is implementing Energy Emergency Alert 3- Firm Load Interruption rotating outages concurrent to the extreme heat incident and includes a significant portion of Sonoma County and/or;
- Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) declares PSPS Warning for outage incidents and/or;
- Unanticipated power outages are occurring affecting a significant number of customers and/or;
- Increase in EMS calls for service and/or emergency room visits compared to the average number for the 7-day period prior and/or;
- Department of Health Services issues a Health Emergency related to Heat and/or a Public Health Order related to Heat

Implementation Criteria - Cold

A single or combination of the below conditions may prompt activation of this phase:

- Forecast overnight temperatures are expected to drop below 28 degrees, and conditions are projected for a minimum of 2 consecutive days, or;
- Forecast overnight temperatures are expected to drop below 32 degrees, and conditions are projected for a minimum of 3 consecutive days, or;
- Forecast temperatures to drop below an average nighttime low of 37 degrees for two consecutive days with accompanying hazardous conditions (e.g., greater than 1" rain, predicted snowfall, flash flood watch/warning, wind chills or extreme temperature fluctuations) **and**;
- NWS issues cold-related Warnings (Freeze, Cold, Frost, etc.) and/or;
- Forecast overnight low temperatures are accompanied with daytime temperatures of 40°F or lower and/or;
- Unanticipated power outages are occurring affecting a significant number of customers and/or;
- Department of Health Services issues a Health Emergency related to Cold and/or a Public Health Order related to Cold

FINDINGS:

F1. The County failed in its critical role in protecting the health and safety of all unhoused people during severe cold weather emergencies during the winters of 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

We disagree wholly with this statement. We do not agree that the County failed in its role in protecting the health and safety of unhoused people during the cold weather emergency of the time periods described. The County convened all of the appropriate stakeholders during those events such as the cities, county departments, service providers, homeless providers, first responders, State personnel, schools, PG&E, the National Weather Service and others to ensure we are informed of weather events and addressing any gaps, particularly in the unhoused population. The County opened a warming center during the events at the Veteran's Hall Building. The County coordinated appropriate messaging to homeless service providers regarding the weather events and coordinated with homeless providers regarding the location of open warming centers. County teams updated a QR-code based English-Spanish flier that links folks to updated information during the 2022-2023 event. The County team developed COVID-19 mitigation strategies and disseminated them to stakeholders during these events in an effort to protect the health and safety of our unhoused population we also provided hotel rooms and warm resources such as blankets for those unwilling to come in out of the elements.

F2. Inadequate coordination between the various involved County agencies led to an inefficient and less effective response to cold weather emergencies that negatively affected the health and safety of unhoused people.

We disagree wholly with this statement. The County coordinated appropriately during both winter events with the National Weather Service to determine the appropriate alerts to be disseminated

throughout the community including to the unhoused population. Messaging went out to all homeless providers and existing shelters. The County actively worked with the cities as well as homeless service providers during these events to coordinate the appropriate care and shelter for the unhoused in our community. Daily status and check-in calls were convened by the Department of Emergency Management to address any needs and to receive updates. The Community Development Commission's Ending Homelessness unit collaborated with homeless providers to determine open shelters and any needed shelter capacity. The County also opened a warming shelter at the Veteran's Hall Building in Sonoma during both events that was not well attended by the unhoused population. COVID-19 protocols were also addressed during this time, in particular during the 2021-2022 event and appropriate resources such as masks were stocked at the centers via Department of Health Services medical unit.

F5. A lack of clear definition and understanding of the responsibilities of various County departments regarding the cold weather protection of unhoused people increases their health risks.

We disagree with this finding in part as there has been clear understanding of the responsibilities of County departments, but this has not been spelled out in writing until the recent approval of the Department of Emergency Management's Operations Annex. County departments have coordinated and worked in collaboration during these events with cities and homeless service providers to mitigate health risks to the unhoused population. I think it is important to point out that our unhoused population are often resistant to coming into congregate warming centers, although temporary, this is often the appropriate set up during these events.

F8. Providing temporary shelter for unhoused people during weather emergencies does not receive the priority from the County to enable appropriate funding for staff, supplies, transportation, and other expenditures to meet this critical need.

We disagree with this finding. The County spends approximately \$70M annually in funding (an underestimate at best) for housing, services, and supports for our unhoused population. The Board provided over \$850K in emergency funding for those in encampments throughout the county, providing critical urgent relief to many experiencing weather events, crisis, etc...

F10. By not protecting unhoused people during cold weather emergencies, the County has failed to adhere to its own Department of Health Services' mission statement to "promote, protect, and ensure access to services to support the health, recovery, and well-being of all in Sonoma County."

We disagree with this finding as the County has not failed to adhere to its mission statement by not protecting unhoused people during cold weather emergencies. The County does employ efforts to protect the unhoused during cold weather emergencies with messaging, in coordination and partnership with appropriate stakeholder groups, opening a county-run warming center, disseminating warming center locations broadly, distributing supplies, providing hotel rooms as

funding allows, developing, implementing and ensuring mitigating measures at city, homeless provider, and county warming centers are in compliance for the health and safety of the unhoused.

F11. At the time of the complaint and through the winter of 2022-2023 the County failed to assign responsibility to an agency or individual to declare that a cold weather emergency existed.

We disagree with this finding. The Department of Emergency Management (DEM) takes the lead regarding this responsibility. The Department of Emergency Management works closely with the National Weather Service who declares the weather event and DEM will send out a declaration should weather conditions meet the appropriate criteria. DEM will work closely with the County Health Officer who may also send out a separate declaration. DEM works closely with all county stakeholders to provide updates on weather conditions as they are received from the National Weather Service. During severe events, daily convenings are hosted by DEM where a National Weather Service representative is always present to provide real-time updates so decisions can be discussed and implemented as necessary.

F12. At the time of the complaint and through the winter of 2022-2023, the County failed to consistently determine when the temperature and other weather conditions constituted a cold weather emergency.

We disagree with this finding. The Department of Emergency Management works closely with the National Weather Service to determine when the temperature or other weather conditions constitute a cold weather emergency. These events must meet established criteria. Once these weather events meet criteria the appropriate weather emergency is declared. DEM works closely with all county stakeholders to provide updates on weather conditions as they are received from the National Weather Service. During severe events, daily convenings are hosted by DEM where a National Weather Service representative is always present to provide real-time updates so decisions can be discussed and implemented as appropriate and necessary.

F13. The County failed to consistently collect and utilize data such as costs, staffing, facilities, and the number of unhoused individuals who took advantage of the limited number of warming centers in the County, which hinders the ability to plan for future cold weather emergencies.

We disagree with this finding. The County did collect data from cities and homeless providers and provided a summary report to previous CAO leadership. The number of individuals taking advantage of the warming centers is reported out in the DEM convenings and was provided to the County upon request. This information assisted in planning number of supplies needed, staffing capacity, and has served to gauge future funding needs for warming center efforts.