

**ORANGE COUNTY SCHOOLS DISASTER PLANS:
A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN ?**

SUMMARY

Schools have many responsibilities; among them are the safety and care of our children. Parents expect that once they deliver their children to the school they can go about their day without concern, feeling confident that the school is fully capable of taking care of any incident that may occur. The federal government, State of California, and local governments have enacted laws and regulations requiring that schools have in place an adequate disaster preparedness plan. The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) is the recognized standard. All public entities are required to have a plan that mirrors SEMS, to assure the inter-operability of the county's emergency system. The intent of this study is to evaluate the emergency preparedness plans of all school districts, and selected schools in this county. The Grand Jury's concern is the ability of Orange County Schools to respond to a variety of incidents in an effective and organized manner.

The main focus of the study is to determine if the school plans include all the components of SEMS.

- Do the schools have personnel assigned to the various positions?
- Are there back ups for all positions?
- Are the assigned persons trained for their duties?
- Do they perform drills based on the plan?

The Grand Jury also looked at the completeness of the plan:

- Was a hazards assessment in the area of the school performed?
- Is there a plot plan identifying the location of critical stations?
- Are the necessary resources available to deal with an incident?
- Has each school identified a variety of potential incidents and are there procedures to deal with each incident?

The results of our study indicate that, with the exception of a few schools, most plans were in need of much improvement. Some plans were very skeletal, covering earthquake duck and cover and fires only. Some districts appear to have been unprepared for the materials we asked them to provide; some of the plans were recently downloaded from the internet and had not been disseminated to the schools in the district.

The Grand Jury's conclusion is that there are few schools that have a well developed plan to assist them in coping with a major incident.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

There have been an increasing number of violent acts being committed on school campuses. The Columbine massacre in Littleton, Colorado on April 20, 1999, was the catalyst; since that time several additional tragic incidents have taken place. Accidents and natural disasters

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

are other examples of incidents for which school districts have to prepare. Hurricane Katrina is an example of our vulnerability to natural disasters. In California, the East Bay Hills fire near Oakland, California in 1991, was instrumental in the passage of the Petris Bill to improve emergency responses in our state. Another threat Californians live with, and one of our greatest concerns, is that of a sudden and unexpected earthquake. We know it is coming, we just do not know when. The Grand Jury is also concerned that there may be hazards on our freeways that could potentially impact our schools. All these possibilities are a reality that everyone has learned to live with; having a plan to deal with the consequences is what is needed. The real question is, are the schools prepared? This is what the Grand Jury set out to determine.

METHOD OF STUDY

1. Reviewed applicable law to determine what is expected of school districts.
2. Reviewed the disaster preparedness plans of each district in Orange County.
3. Randomly selected a sampling of elementary, middle and high schools from the districts to evaluate.
4. Visited a small percentage of the schools to examine school resources, to review the quality of their disaster plans, and to establish a comfort level about the safety of children in schools.

BACKGROUND AND FACTS

The California Office of Emergency Services provided the Grand Jury with laws relating to emergency plans. The Katz Act of the California Education Code requires that schools prepare for earthquakes and other emergencies. The Petris Bill of the California Government Code requires that schools be prepared to respond to emergencies using SEMS. Failure to be compliant by December 1996 subjects the school districts to the risk of losing state assistance funds for emergency response.

The first step in this study was to request a copy of each school district's disaster preparedness plan. This provided the Grand Jury the opportunity to make the districts aware of the study and its methodology; that the Grand Jury would be requesting a copy of selected schools site-specific plans; and that some of their schools would receive an onsite visit. Some of the school districts were very responsive, while others readily admitted that they had an intention of reworking their plans. The Grand Jury's initial request for copies of school district and school plans was made in early September 2006, with follow-up and second requests continuing until the latter part of January, 2007. As the Grand Jury reviewed plans the reason for delays became apparent; the districts and the schools realized that their plans needed much improvement. On the positive side, it was also evident that school emergency preparedness was taking a much higher priority as a result of the Grand Jury inquiry. During one of the Grand Jury on-site surveys, a district representative was present to assist the school principal in her presentation. His position in the district was that of Supervisor of Maintenance and Security, and he had been in that job for one month. In that short period of time, he had located an example of an ideal disaster plan, been in contact

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

with the Orange County Department of Education for assistance, and familiarized himself with the components of SEMS. He was very conversant on what was needed to get their district to the expected level.

The Orange County Department of Education [OCDE] indicated that it is the responsibility of the individual school districts and their schools to establish and maintain adequate emergency preparedness plans. OCDE can provide samples of SEMS plans, assist districts in ensuring that all the proper elements are present, and review their completed plans. The OCDE also has presentations available regarding emergency preparedness.

California Education Code section 32281 makes each school district and county office of education responsible for the overall development of all comprehensive school safety plans. Section 32288 requires each school district or county office of education to notify the State Department of Education, by October 15th of the year of discovery, of any schools that have not complied with section 32281.

The criteria the Grand Jury used in evaluating the plans are a compilation from the following sources;

- 2004 American Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Academy;
- California Governors Office of Emergency Services, Standardized Emergency Management System Guidelines;
- Orange County Emergency Management Organization School Committee, SEMS Emergency Operations Center Course for Schools; and
- Orange County Department of Education, School ICS Organization (Incident Command Center).

The first part of the evaluation of each plan was to determine if it complied with the SEMS requirements. In doing so the Grand Jury had the following questions.

- Does the plan incorporate the principles of SEMS?
- Are the teachers and staff aware of their roles?
- Have they been trained to perform their responsibilities?
- Does the school conduct drills and exercises that involve the performance of these responsibilities?
- The schools are required to have plot plans available; are the locations of the main water, gas, electrical shut off valves identified on the plot plan?
- Are the locations of First Aid stations and the location of emergency supplies identified on the plot plan?
- Has the school made an assessment of the skills and/or needs of its staff, and have the appropriate people been trained on first aid, CPR, damage assessments, search and rescue and fire suppression?
- Lastly, are the staff members aware that they are emergency disaster workers under California Government code 3100?

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

Exhibit 2, an excerpt from the Governor's Office of Emergency Services "Standardized Emergency Management Systems Guidelines", provides a synopsis of SEMS.

No plan is complete without a mitigation study, which should include the following:

- Has a survey of the security of heavy objects, bookshelves, cupboards, partitions and overhead lights been made to determine corrective action to be taken?
- Has an inventory been taken of hazardous chemicals in areas such as science laboratories, automotive repair and maintenance shops?
- How and where are vital records and data stored?
- Has the school made a local area hazards assessment study?
- Is the school located near a freeway or railroad where the carrying of hazardous materials may be a concern? Is it located near a local bank where a robbery could take place and carry over into the school area? Is it in the direct path of air traffic?

We next evaluated the school facilities' fitness to deal with an incident:

- Has an Emergency Operations Center been identified and has an alternate site been selected?
- Has the EOC been equipped with maps and needed material to establish the command center?
- What methods does the school have to communicate internally as well as with the district and is there an alternate system?
- Has the school identified a specific area for the release and pick-up of students, and what is the procedure for the release of students?

The evaluations of the district plan and the school site specific plans are similar. The Grand Jury was interested in the functionality of the plans as well as their completeness.

- Is the plan one complete manual or is the material scattered among more than one book?
- Does the manual have a table of contents?
- Is a listing of emergency telephone numbers available?
- Does the manual include procedures on how to deal with multiple hazards?
- Does the manual include a listing of teachers and staff, and is there a teacher's buddy plan in place?
- How are substitute teachers trained?

Another concern is the adequacy of the staffing for EOC positions. Are alternates assigned to each position? In some instances the Grand Jury found that some key personnel were assigned to multiple positions, with the potential for over-burdening. With the diverse population of Orange County, the availability of non-English speaking assistance is a must; therefore, the Grand Jury looked to see if the schools addressed this need.

The plans were graded after a thorough review. If the school plan met the SEMS requirements, it merited an expected rating. Plans that did not meet the criteria were rated as

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

below expected. Schools plans that not only met the SEMS requirements, but went beyond them, were rated as exceeds expected. The School Disaster Management Plans/Evaluation Matrix reflects the Grand Jury's evaluation.

EXHIBIT 1

SCHOOL DISASTER PLAN EVALUATION MATRIX

TOTALS

Grading = *Above Expected* - AE (5 districts & 8 schools)
 Expected - E (10 districts & 12 schools)
 Below Expected- BE (12 districts & 26 schools)

School District	Schools <i>Elementary School</i>E <i>Middle School</i>M <i>High School</i>H	Grade	Received
Anaheim City		AE	10/17/06
	Clara Barton - E	AE	Site Visit
Anaheim Union		BE	10/24/06
	Anaheim – H	E	1/24/07
	Ball - M	BE	Site Visit
Brea-Olinda		BE	11/01/06
	Brea Country Hills - E	E	11/13/06
	Brea - M	E	11/01/06
	Brea Canyon - H	BE	11/01/06
Buena Park		BE	11/18/06
	Charles Emery - E	E	Site Visit
Capistrano Unified		BE	9/29/06
	Barcelona Hills - E	AE	10/31/06
	Marco Forster – M	AE	10/31/06
	Capistrano Valley - H	AE	10/31/06
Centralia		E	9/26/06
	Buena Terra – E	E	11/06/06
Cypress		BE	9/15/06
	Cawthon - E	BE	11/02/06
Fountain Valley		E	9/25/06
	Robert Gisler - E	BE	10/11/06

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

	Samuel Talbert - M	BE	10/26/06
Fullerton Joint Union		BE	12/04/06
	Sonora - H	BE	11/15/06
Fullerton		E	10/24/06
	Robert C. Fisler - E	BE	Site Visit
	D. Russell Parks Jr. - M	E	11/06/06
Garden Grove		BE	10/26/06
	Brookhurst – E	BE	10/26/06
	Dr. Leroy L. Doig – M	BE	10/26/06
	Bolsa Grande - H	BE	10/26/06
Huntington Beach City		E	10/20/06
	Agnes L. Smith - E	E	11/06/06
	Issac L. Sowers – M	E	10/31/06
Huntington Beach Union		E	10/30/06
	Fountain Valley - H	BE	11/07/06
Irvine		E	11/06/06
	Westpark -E	AE	10/30/06
	South Lake – M	BE	10/31/06
	Woodbridge - H	E	10/31/06
La Habra		BE	10/31/06
	Las Positas - E	BE	10/31/06
	Imperial - M	BE	10/31/06
Laguna Beach Unified		BE	10/23/06
	El Morro – E	BE	10/23/06
	Thurston – M	BE	10/23/06
	Laguna Beach - H	BE	10/23/06
Los Alamitos Unified		BE	
	Los Alamitos – E	BE	11/02/06
	McAuliffe – M	BE	11/02/06
	Los Alamitos - H	BE	10/05/06
Magnolia		BE	11/02/06
	Dr. Peter Marshall - E	BE	11/02/06
Newport-Mesa Unified		AE	9/26/06
	Adams – E	BE	10/30/06
	Ensign – M	BE	10/03/06

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

	Corona Del Mar - H	E	Site Visit
Ocean View		E	9/15/06
	Westmont - E	AE	9/20/06
	Vista View – M	E	10/18/06
Orange Unified		AE	9/26/06
	Cambridge – E	E	11/21/06
	Cerro Villa – M	AE	1/22/07
	El Modena - H	BE	11/21/06
Placentia-Yorba Linda		E	10/31/06
	Fairmont – E	BE	10/31/06
	Kremer - M	BE	10/31/06
	Esperanza - H	BE	10/31/06
Saddleback Valley		AE	10/24/06
	DePortola – E	E	10/26/06
	Los Alisos – M	BE	10/26/06
	Laguna Hills - H	BE	10/26/06
Santa Ana Unified		E	9/20/06
	Edison – E	BE	10/17/06
	Mendez Fundamental - M	BE	Site Visit
	Saddleback - H	BE	10/31/06
Savanna		AE	10/17/06
	Holder - E	BE	10/17/06
Tustin Unified		E	9/15/06
	Ladera – E	BE	10/24/06
	Pioneer – M	BE	11/06/06
	Tustin - H	AE	Site Visit
Westminster		BE	9/29/06
	Sequoia - E	BE	10/30/06
Orange County Department of Education		E	11/02/06

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Grand Jury was disappointed in the quality of the Emergency Preparedness plans. There were some bright exceptions; the Grand Jury identified the Clara Barton Elementary School and Anaheim City School District plans as models for other schools to

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

follow. All three schools sampled in the Capistrano Unified School District met the expectations of the Grand Jury. The Orange Unified School District's plan was rated above expected; yet of the schools sampled in the district only their middle school, Cerro Villa School, was rated above expected. The implication is that the implementation of Orange Unified School District plans at the school level needs addressing.

The quality of the disaster plans is grossly unacceptable. 12 of the districts (44 %) had disaster plans that the Grand Jury evaluated as below expected; it is not surprising that thirty seven of the schools sampled (63%) received a below expected rating.

Ten school districts (37%), and thirteen schools (22%) received an expected evaluation, which means that the plan met the Grand Jury's minimum requirements of SEMS; however, these plans are still in need of much improvement.

Five school districts (19%) received above expected evaluations; likewise, eight schools (14%) were rated above expected.

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code section 933 and 933.05 each finding will be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. The 2006-2007 Orange Grand Jury has arrived at the following finding:

F-1. The over-all quality of the 28 Orange County School Districts and their individual school's emergency preparedness plans are in need of much improvement.

F-2. California Education Code 32288 requires that each school district or county office of education notify the State Department of Education, by October 15th of the year of discovery, of any schools that have not complied with section 32281.

A Response to Finding F-1 is required from all 28 Orange County School Districts Superintendents.

A Response to Finding F-2 is required from The Orange County Superintendent of Schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code section 933 and 933.05, each recommendation will be responded to by the government agency to which it is addressed. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based on the findings of this report, the 2006-2007 Orange County Grand Jury makes the following recommendations:

R-1. Orange County school districts should make sure that they and their individual schools have a SEMS equivalent plan, and these should be submitted to the Orange County Department of Education/Superintendent of Schools for review.

R-2. The Orange County Department of Education/ Superintendent of Schools should notify the State Department of Education by October 15, 2007 of any school that does not

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

have a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan that mirrors SEMS as required by California law.

A Response to Recommendation R-1 is required from all 28 Orange County School Districts Superintendent.

A Response to Recommendation R-2 is required from the Orange County Superintendent of Schools.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

The California Penal Code specifies the required permissible responses to the findings and recommendations contained in this report. The specific sections are quoted below:

§ 933.05. Responses to findings

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

- (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
- (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions

- (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
- (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.
- (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with 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 head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed...This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of the publication of the grand jury report.
- (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

EXHIBIT 2

Standardized Emergency Management System Guidelines

Part I. System Description

Section A

GENERAL SYSTEM DESCRIPTION

What is SEMS? The Standardized Emergency Management System is the system required by Government Code Section 8607 (a) for managing emergencies involving multiple jurisdictions and agencies. SEMS consists of five organizational levels, which are activated as necessary:

1. field response
2. local government
3. operational area

2006-2007 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

4. regional
5. state

SEMS incorporates the functions and principles of the Incident Command System (ICS), the Master Mutual Aid Agreement (MMAA), existing mutual aid systems, the operational area concept, and multi-agency or inter-agency coordination. Local governments must use SEMS to be eligible for funding of their response-related personnel costs under state disaster assistance programs.

PURPOSE OF SEMS: SEMS has been established to provide effective management of multi-agency and multijurisdictional emergencies in California. By standardizing key elements of the emergency management system, SEMS is intended to:

- facilitate the flow of information within and between levels of the system, and
- facilitate coordination among all responding agencies.

Use of SEMS will improve the mobilization, deployment, utilization, tracking, and demobilization of needed mutual aid resources. Use of SEMS will reduce the incidence of poor coordination and communications, and reduce resource ordering duplication on multi-agency and multijurisdictional responses. SEMS is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the varied disasters that occur in California and to the needs of all emergency responders.