



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF
DAVID O. LIVINGSTON
SHERIFF - CORONER

July 30, 2024

Peter Appert, Foreperson
2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury
725 Court Street P.O. Box 431
Martinez, CA 94553-0091

VIA EMAIL AND US MAIL

RE: Grand Jury Report No. 2402, The Contra Costa County Community Warning System: Will Everyone Get a Warning in Time?

Dear Mr. Appert,

In response to your letter dated June 5, 2024, wherein you submitted findings and recommendations regarding the Contra Costa County Community Warning System, please see the responses below:

Findings:

F19. At all times, one of the three CWS employees is the designated on-call duty officer who responds to requests for activation of the CWS.

Response: Partially disagree with the findings. The Office of the Sheriff has three funded full-time CWS employees (one manager and two employees) assigned to the CWS Unit to manage, operate, test, train, evaluate, and develop policies and procedures related to the CWS and all emergency alert platforms. Any of the three CWS employees can be contacted during regular business hours to activate the CWS. We also have additional staff not assigned to the CWS who are trained to operate the system. During non-business hours, one of the full-time CWS employees is the on-call duty officer, and designated backup personnel are available if the duty officer cannot be reached.

F20. In the event of disasters such as fast-moving wildfires, a reasonable time for alerts to be sent to the public is within 20 minutes of when the incident commander contacts the CWS duty officer.

Response: Partially disagree with the finding. The CWS's ability to deliver effective and prompt alerts relies primarily on incident commanders providing timely, critical, and accurate

information to the CWS duty officer. The incident commander's timely provision of required information directly impacts the time necessary for an alert to go out to the public.

F21. Once the CWS duty officer is contacted by the Sheriff's dispatch center the CWS duty officer has up to 10 minutes to call the incident commander.

Response: Agree with the finding.

F22. In the event the CWS duty officer is not reached after two attempts to contact them, the dispatch center attempts to contact a backup person to the duty officer.

Response: Agree with the finding. CWS is developing a more robust call tree procedure requiring dispatch to immediately contact backup personnel if the duty officer cannot be reached after the initial attempt during non-business hours.

F23. Additional time is required to contact CWS backup personnel and have them get to a computer and establish a secure connection into the CWS.

Response: Agree with the finding.

F24. In the event the CWS duty officer is not reached after two attempts by the dispatch center to contact them, the time required to contact backup personnel to the on-call CWS duty officer is uncertain.

Response: Agree with the finding. CWS is developing a more robust call tree procedure requiring dispatch to immediately contact backup personnel if the duty officer cannot be reached after the initial attempt during non-business hours to mitigate potential time delays caused by human or technological factors.

F25. Reliance on a single person to operate the CWS, the on-call CWS duty officer, creates a risk that alerts and notifications could be delayed.

Response: Partially disagree with the finding. During business hours, all three full-time CWS Unit employees are on duty and available to activate the CWS. During non-business hours, the CWS utilizes backup personnel, primarily assigned to the CWS, to limit the risk of delays if the on-call duty officer is not initially available. Additionally, reliance on non-CWS personnel, i.e., dispatchers, to operate the system may create an additional delay risk since they will only use the system occasionally, and their familiarity with it may be limited.

F26. Two evacuation drills in the city of Richmond in 2022 and 2023 resulted in half of the drill participants claiming they should have received a drill alert but did not, or received the alert hours after the drill was completed.

Response: Disagree with the finding. CWS data does not support the finding. CWS data indicates approximately 90% overall successful delivery rate for both drills.

F27. The CWS did not conduct any studies to verify or understand the claims Richmond evacuation drill participants made that they should have received a drill alert but did not, or received the alert hours later after the drill was completed.

Response: Disagree with the finding. CWS staff did not receive feedback from the city of Richmond aside from the input from the survey results. Our CWS data indicated a high successful delivery rate for each event. CWS staff conducted an in-depth analysis of the data, which confirmed an overall successful delivery rate of approximately 90%. This analysis also included why a low percentage of users did not receive the alerts.

F28. The CWS is not tested to determine the extent to which people actually notice, read, or hear alerts sent by the CWS.

Response: Partially disagree with the finding. The CWS conducts ongoing scheduled and unscheduled testing of the system. The system testing can only verify that registered users received the alert, not who noticed, read, or heard it.

F34. The Emergency Services Policy Board (ESPB) can create subcommittees, such as a CWS advisory committee.

Response: Partially disagree with the finding. Only the ESPB can respond if it can create a subcommittee. The Board of Supervisors has a current Industrial Safety Ordinance (ISO) and Community Warning System (CWS) Ad Hoc Committee that regularly meets to discuss and review the CWS.

F35. The CWS staff provides training materials to the fire districts/departments, police departments, and dispatch centers in the County on the use of CWS, its tools, types of warnings, activation, and information needed by the CWS duty officer.

Response: Agree with the finding.

F36. The CWS staff does not have a process to determine if the recipients of the training it provides to the first responders of the fire districts/departments, police departments, and dispatch centers who receive the training materials on CWS have read and understood the training materials.

Response: Partially disagree with the finding. The CWS is implementing a training attestation process for Office of the Sheriff employees. The CWS will have discussions with external agencies to confirm if a similar training attestation can be self-imposed by those agencies.

Recommendations:

R4. By June 30, 2025, the Office of the Sheriff should train employees in the Sheriff's dispatch center to operate the CWS.

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The following information is provided for your information only. It is not intended to be used as a substitute for professional advice. Please consult your attorney for more information.

For more information, please contact the Department of Social Services at (800) 342-9333.

System support may vary between versions of the software. Please refer to the user manual for more information.

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Response: The recommendation requires further analysis. This recommendation will require further evaluation of the current dispatch training protocols, dispatch system access capabilities, dispatch staffing, and potential resource allocation. This analysis will be completed within six months of the publication date of the Civil Grand Jury Report.

R5. By March 31, 2025, the Office of the Sheriff should implement a plan to conduct testing of the CWS to determine the causes of the failure of CWS alerts to reach all the intended recipients of test alerts within 10 - 20 minutes of the alert being sent.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The Office of the Sheriff already conducts ongoing scheduled and unscheduled testing of the CWS. During and after each test, CWS staff evaluates all alerts after they are sent to determine sent/received success rates and causations for failed sent alerts. Furthermore, as part of the testing, the CWS Unit thoroughly reviews all the system's alerting components, including ongoing review and updates to CWS policies and procedures.

R8. By June 30, 2025, the Office of the Sheriff should implement a process to ensure that first responders in County agencies who take the CWS training certify they have reviewed and understood the training materials.

Response: The recommendation requires further analysis. The Office of the Sheriff will assess the use of online training software to attest that Office of the Sheriff employees have reviewed and understood the training materials. Further analysis of outside county agencies' training standards and practices would need to be conducted to determine if each county department can implement a similar procedure. This analysis will be completed within six months of the publication date of the Civil Grand Jury Report.

Please let me know if my staff or I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

DAVID O. LIVINGSTON, Sheriff-Coroner



Jose Beltran, Assistant Sheriff
Support Services Bureau

JB:sl