

# Emergency Services Organization Needed, County Grand Jury Says

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The grand jury blames the lack of a county emergency services organization for most of the problems encountered trying to cope with the Jan. 3-5 storm.

Because of the lack of organization, the county "was not prepared to meet the demands caused by the disaster," the grand jury said in the first part of its 1981-82 final report, which was made public this morning.

Organization to deal with such a disaster "exists on paper only," the grand jury concludes. The county's plan to deal with emergencies was not generally known by persons and agencies responsible for dealing with the disaster.

Instead, the grand jury writes, "the ad hoc organization which arose was a poor substitute."

Important emergency functions, such as procurement of materials and equipment, liaison with the state Office of Emergency Services, the army and neighboring governments "were being handled by individual members of the Board of Supervisors, the acting county administrative officer (George Newell), members of the supervisors' staff, the congressional representative and his aide and numerous other volunteers," according to the report.

"The lack of coordination and cooperation caused confusion," the grand jury says.

Many of the problems, according to the report, were caused because the county had not established an on-going disaster planning program as set forth by county code nor had it

established a functioning disaster council to oversee such planning.

"The county code provides for a specific chain of command to be established in a disaster situation. This intended chain of command was not followed. Even the authority which should have been exercised by the acting CAO/DES (director of emergency services) was delegated to an unqualified CAO staff member and diffused to an amorphous group of individuals," the report states.

The grand jury recommends that a disaster council be activated immediately to establish a chain of command and an organization for dealing with disasters.

It further recommends the Board of Supervisors order the county emergency services plan be rewritten into a concise, usable document, outlining organization, responsibility and procedures to be used in an emergency. The acting CAO/DES should assume a leadership role in accomplishing those recommendations, according to the report.

The grand jury also recommends that a concise emergency pamphlet be published and distributed to county residents, outlining what to do during and after an emergency.

The county legally has designated an emergency services coordinator, Sheriff's Lt. Bill Plageman, but he was not given enough authority to carry out his assigned responsibilities. The grand jury recommends that the position be changed from staff to line rank and that all county employees and officials back up the OES coordinator's authority.

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The grand jury does not generally question the performance of the departments concerned with law enforcement, public safety and health, road maintenance and environmental planning, which "were continuing to provide the services for which they were constituted."

The report specifically praises the functioning of the Sheriff's Office during the storm, saying, "The personnel of the sheriff's department was (were) deployed to advantage, and it made use of mutual aid personnel. This department was one of the few which used proper and established channels to get outside aid and assistance."

The grand jury also praises radio station KSCO, the local chapter of the American Red Cross, amateur radio operators and the Association of Churches for their efforts during the storm.

The county, according to the report, also had problems dealing with the aftermath of the storm in helping residents "return to normal."

The report scores the planning and building departments for red tape "that entangles citizens attempting to get the necessary permits, even under ordinary conditions."

After the storm, according to the report, "not only was normal red tape evoked, but there are also reports of abnormal interference by county personnel. For instance, tenants left after being incorrectly told their landlords would not be permitted to rebuild."

The grand jury recommends that every means be taken to speed up the permit procedure for residents needing to rebuild or repair damage and that fees be reduced or eliminated where possible after a declared emergency.