



**Monterey County Board of Supervisors**

**Response to the**

**2021 - 2022 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury**

*Topic:* "Monterey County's Initial Response to Covid -19 Pandemic"

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**REPORT TITLE: 2021 - 2022 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report –**

*Topic: "Monterey County's Initial Response to Covid -19 Pandemic"*

**RESPONSE BY:** Monterey County Board of Supervisors

**RESPONSE TO:** Findings F1 and F2

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**FINDINGS**

<b>F1</b>	<b>Monterey County does not have a Pandemic Response Plan that focuses on processes and procedures for addressing the public health needs of the public during a pandemic.</b>
<p>Response to F1</p> <p>The Board of Supervisors disagrees with this finding.</p> <p>The Health Department’s All Hazards Emergency Operations Plan outlines the strategies and activities the Department Operations Center (DOC) would initiate in response to large outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics. The plan includes but is not limited to annexes addressing continuity of operations, risk communication, epidemiology and surveillance, mass prophylaxis, and isolation and quarantine. Additionally, the Monterey County Office of Emergency Services manages and maintains the Monterey County Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) which is an all-hazards response plan. The EOP does not have a Pandemic Response Plan Annex</p>	
<b>F2</b>	<b>The Monterey County Health Department’s “Pandemic Influenza Plan” (last updated June 11, 2013) does not address how the Health Department would continue to provide essential county services to Monterey County during a pandemic crisis.</b>
<p>Response to F2</p> <p>The Board of Supervisors partially disagrees with this finding.</p> <p>While the Monterey County Health Department’s “Pandemic Influenza Plan, ” which is Annex F to the Department’s All Hazards Emergency Operations Plan, does not address how the Health Department would continue to provide essential county services during a pandemic, the Department’s All Hazards Emergency Operations Plan Annex A - Continuity of Operations Plan (last updated January 2018) outlines the Health Department’s strategies for continuing essential services during a significant emergency or disaster such as a pandemic.</p>	

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*Topic: "Monterey County's Initial Response to Covid -19 Pandemic"*

**RESPONSE BY:** Monterey County Board of Supervisors

**RESPONSE TO:** Findings F3 and F4

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<b>F3</b>	<b>Monterey County did not use the existing AMC system to communicate public health information to the Monterey County residents and businesses subscribing to the service.</b>
<p><i>Response F3</i></p> <p>The Board of Supervisors partially disagrees with this finding.</p> <p>Alert Monterey County was leveraged utilizing multiple methods for disseminating information. Through Alert Monterey County, a Nixle Channel “MCCOVID” was established at the onset of the pandemic and was advertised on the Public Health website and social media, OES website and social media, and to the media in press briefings. This channel disseminated daily text messages to subscribers with public health statistics and updates on changing regulations. Additionally, Alert Monterey County was utilized to disseminate a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) to the entire community when the Shelter-in-Place order was first issued in 2020; the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was widely criticized and received community backlash for utilizing the system in this incident. Emergency Notification Systems such as Alert Monterey County (AMC) are intended to be used to communicate one-way alerts to communities during an emergency situation instructing them to take immediate action to preserve life and property, such as orders to evacuate. Health DOC and EOC Joint Information Center (JIC) staff recognized that long-term disasters such as a pandemic do not typically require immediate action by the community. Rather, Health DOC and EOC JIC relied on a variety of messaging outlets in multiple languages to numerous target populations to educate and inform. In addition, Health DOC personnel met with the media, elected officials, school leaders, health agency administrators, and regulated businesses to recommend messaging and communication strategies to various communities.</p> <p>The “Reverse 9-1-1” function of Alert Monterey County was not utilized at the recommendation of staff, as this function is primarily utilized for informing the public of immediate threats to life and property. The pandemic was a slow onset protracted event that did not necessitate the use of “Reverse 9-1-1”; utilization of this function would not have been commensurate with the nature of the threat at the time.</p>	
<b>F4</b>	<b>Monterey County’s EOC did not have sufficient certified speakers or translators to provide accurate and timely communication or messaging to the non-English speaking population in the County.</b>
<p><i>Response F4</i></p> <p>The Board of Supervisors partially disagrees with this finding.</p> <p>The Health DOC relied almost entirely on bilingual Department staff and contracted vendors to translate messages to the public. Bilingual Health staff also served as DOC spokespersons for interviews with the media. On rare occasion, the DOC requested translation support from the EOC JIC. In addition, the County recruited Spanish speaking community leaders and celebrities to create and disseminate public messages to the Spanish speaking community through social media, radio and television.</p>	

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*Topic: "Monterey County's Initial Response to Covid -19 Pandemic"*

**RESPONSE BY:** Monterey County Board of Supervisors

**RESPONSE TO:** Findings F5, F6 and F7

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**FINDINGS**

<b>F5</b>		<b>The County Health Department did not acknowledge its lead role and responsibilities as Incident Commander in the County EOC during a public health emergency.</b>
<i>Response F5</i>  The Board of Supervisors partially disagrees with this finding. The California Emergency Services Act 2015 requires that the County Health Department use Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) to respond to emergency events. Accordingly, the Department activated and still operates the Health Department Operations Center (DOC) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director of Public Health/Health Officer was dedicated full-time to serve as the DOC Incident Commander, while the Director of Health served as the Command Liaison. DOC Command identified other personnel within the DOC command structure that assumed roles under the EOC Command structure.		
<b>F6</b>		<b>The County Health Officer did not appear to use the full authority of his office to command and direct the County response to COVID-19 in Monterey County.</b>
<i>Response F6</i>  The Board of Supervisors disagrees with this finding. Although neither California statute nor California Code of Regulations require that local Health Officers direct disaster response at the local jurisdictional level, the Monterey County Director of Public Health/Health Officer did serve as the full-time Department Operations Center (DOC) Incident Commander.		
<b>F7</b>		<b>Monterey County did not follow the unified chain of command protocols of SEMS and ICS to communicate pandemic information to the public.</b>
<i>Response F7</i>  The Board of Supervisors disagrees with this finding.  The County acknowledges it had many communication struggles throughout the response. However, the County did follow the Standardized Emergency Management System and Incident Command System, and the National Incident Management System to communicate pandemic information to the public. This is supported by the County Emergency Operations Plan, Incident Action Plans, establishment of the Public Information Officers within the Emergency Operations Center organizational structure, chain of command protocols for development and dissemination of content, Operation Area Coordination Calls, and Media Briefings. Incident command systems guide all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and the private sector to work together to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from incidents. Accordingly, many agencies in the County, including the Health Department, established their own incident command system in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and designated a PIO in their command structure. Each PIO helped develop messages and communicate to their respective communities. In addition, the County EOC Joint Information Center, comprised of PIO representatives from several local incident command centers, supported the ongoing messaging by local agencies to the public.		

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**RESPONSE BY:** Monterey County Board of Supervisors

**RESPONSE TO:** Findings F8

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<b>F8</b>	<b>The County's communications to the public did not address the needs of the hearing-impaired residents in Monterey County.</b>
<p><i>Response F8</i></p> <p>The Board of Supervisors partially disagrees with this finding.</p> <p>The Health Department Operations Center developed and disseminated messaging via social, television and print media, and other outlets which do make written, closed captioning and audio messaging available for residents in Monterey County with hearing impairments. Press Briefings from the Emergency Operations Center did not include an American Sign Language Interpreter.</p>	

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*Topic: "Monterey County's Initial Response to Covid -19 Pandemic"*

**RESPONSE BY:** Monterey County Board of Supervisors

**RESPONSE TO:** Recommendations R1

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b>R1</b>	<b>The County use the AMC system to communicate public health emergency information to County residents by Dec. 31, 2022.</b>
<p><i>Response R1</i></p> <p>The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.</p> <p>Alert Monterey County will be leveraged and utilized in a manner that is commensurate with the risk and threat presented to public safety and at the discretion of the Director of Emergency Services. Monterey County follows the State of California Statewide Alert and Warning Guidelines (2019).</p> <p>Alert Monterey County is an Alert and Warning System. Warnings should be issued when there is an imminent threat to life, health, or property. This can include alerts and warnings issued in advance of forecasted severe weather events when doing so will give the public time to evacuate. When a threat exists, even though it might not be imminent, such as a Red Flag Warning, hurricane or flooding, it is advised to communicate that threat out to the public so that they may be better prepared. Warning systems, such as sirens, while helpful in alerting a community of a hazard, should not be used for reassuring the public that an ongoing situation or an upcoming event is not hazardous; other public information channels should be used for those purposes instead.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public Alerts are intended to attract public attention to an unusual situation and motivate individual awareness – The Community is already aware of the situation and have motivation to remain aware; this also implies that there is new and immediate information regarding a threat for which there is not. It is not justified to leverage the “Reverse 9-1-1” Function of Alert Monterey County.</li><li>• Public Alerts are intended to encourage the audience to become attentive and search for additional information assuming they are not aware of the situation - The Community is already actively seeking information from official resources that are maintained by the Monterey County Public Health Department, California Department of Public Health, the Center for Disease Control, and the World Health Organization. It is not justified to leverage the “Reverse 9-1-1” Function of Alert Monterey County.</li><li>• Public Warnings are intended to immediately persuade members of the public to take one or more protective actions in order to reduce losses or harm – The public no longer requires immediate persuasion to reduce losses or harm. It is not justified to leverage the “Reverse 9-1-1” Function of Alert Monterey County.</li></ul>	

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**RESPONSE BY:** Monterey County Board of Supervisors

**RESPONSE TO:** Recommendations R1 (*CONTINUED*), R2, R3 and R4

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b>R1</b>	<b>The County use the AMC system to communicate public health emergency information to County residents by Dec. 31, 2022.</b>
<p><i>CONTINUED</i> Response R1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Protective Actions that are typically recommended include: Shelter-in-place (with or without detailed instructions, such as sealing and/or locking doors and windows); Evacuation; Prepare to evacuate (or to take some other specified action when advised); Prepare for re-entry; Observe or be on the lookout; Take health precautions, such as boiling water; Distribution instructions (for food, water, ice, building materials, medications, etc.). -None of these protective actions apply to the current incident as emergency public health mitigation measures (such as sheltering in place or mask mandates) are lessened and no longer restrictive.</li></ul> <p>There are many methods, both kinetic and cyber, to communicate public health information. The Alert Monterey County system is not the only method for communication and is not the most effective method for communicating complex or lengthy information to the public.</p> <p>Irrelevant warnings can fatigue the public rapidly and lead to recipients discounting further warning messages or opting out of receiving future alerts and warnings. Every effort should be made—within the capabilities of the warning system(s)—to limit the warning to people at risk. At this point in the pandemic, use of Alert Monterey County may fatigue community members which can be detrimental as we enter a severe drought and wildfire season and could cost lives.</p>	
<b>R2</b>	<b>The County implement a public service campaign to significantly increase the number of County residents signed up for the AMC system by Dec. 31, 2022.</b>
<p><i>Response R2</i></p> <p>The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented within the 2022/23 fiscal year.</p> <p>Generally, the Office of Emergency Services is constantly encouraging the public to register with Alert Monterey County. This has been an ongoing endeavor since the system’s inception in 2016. The Monterey County Operational Area Emergency Operation Plan – Crisis Communication Annex is currently under development and should be completed and adopted by July 2023.</p>	
<b>R3</b>	<b>The County Health Officer and Health Department management staff receive SEMS and ICS training to provide the requisite education on the roles and responsibilities of the Health Department during medical disaster or pandemic incidents by Dec. 31, 2022.</b>
<p><i>Response R3</i></p> <p>The recommendation has been partially implemented.</p> <p>The County Director of Public Health/Health Officer and Health Department management staff who routinely fill lead roles in the Department Operations Center (DOC) completed SEMS training prior to December 2019. Monterey County Health Department will continue to schedule SEMS training for Health Department management staff, as appropriate.</p>	



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**RESPONSE TO:** Recommendations R4, R5, and R6

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b>R4</b>	<b>All County personnel that are assigned to fulfill duties in the EOC must be trained in SEMS and ICS by Dec. 31, 2022.</b>
<i>Response R4</i>  The recommendation has been partially implemented for some County personnel who are regularly assigned to duties in the DOC and EOC and will be completed by December 31, 2022 for those not already trained. The County will implement EOC Teams for all positions in the EOC and appropriate SEMS training will be provided.	
<b>R5</b>	<b>Monterey County develop an Infectious Disease Response Plan that addresses the health and safety requirements of county residents during infectious disease outbreaks by June 30, 2023.</b>
<i>Response R5</i>  The recommendation has partially been implemented and further updates to Plan will be made by June 30, 2023. The Health Department’s All Hazards Emergency Operations Plan outlines the strategies and activities the Department Operations Center would initiate in response to large outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics. The plan includes but is not limited to annexes addressing continuity of operations, risk communication, epidemiology and surveillance, mass prophylaxis, and isolation and quarantine. The Department acknowledges that some sections of this plan should be updated and will complete updates by June 30, 2023.	
<b>R6</b>	<b>The County adopt the SEMS and ICS protocols for communicating public health emergency information to the public during an ongoing incident by Dec. 31, 2022.</b>
<i>Response R6</i>  The recommendation has been implemented.  The County of Monterey adopted SEMS and ICS into government code, county policies, and procedures in 1995 when the County of Monterey was established as the Operational Area Authority which was unanimously passed by Supervisors Salinas, Pennycook, Perkins, Johnsen, and Karas (Minute Book 68, Agenda Number 5-15a). The County’s commitment to following and implementing ICS, SEMS, and NIMS is regularly affirmed upon update, ratification, and adoption of the Monterey County Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan (2007, 2014, 2020) and subsequent Annexes.  County Departments that routinely activate Operations Centers already adhere to SEMS, which includes the management of information and emergency communications.	

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**RESPONSE TO:** Recommendations R7, R8 and R9

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b>R7</b>	<b>Public communications during an emergency incident address effective communication with the hearing impaired and non-English speaking County residents by Sept. 1, 2022.</b>
<p><i>Response R7</i></p> <p>The recommendation has been implemented.</p> <p>The Monterey County Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan (2020) which was unanimously passed and adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2020, states: “Monterey County is committed to ensuring that considerations are made for persons – with access and functional needs (AFN) at every stage of the emergency management process. In addition, the County maintains compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Monterey County Office of Emergency Services complies with Assembly Bill No. 477 (2019) which considers the access and functional needs population in emergency planning.”</p> <p>The Monterey County Office of Emergency Services has hired a bi-lingual Emergency Services Planner as of November 2021.</p> <p>During the pandemic, Health DOC relied almost entirely on bilingual Department staff and contracted vendors to translate messages to the public. Bilingual Health staff also served as DOC spokesperson for interviews with the media. On rare occasion, the DOC requested translation support from the EOC JIC. In addition, the County recruited Spanish speaking community leaders and celebrities to create and disseminate public messages to the Spanish speaking community through social media, radio and television.</p>	
<b>R8</b>	<b>The CAO clarify the authority and responsibilities of the Health Department and Health Officer under State Law in responding to medical disaster or infectious disease outbreaks and memorialize them in emergency response plans by Dec. 31, 2022.</b>
<p><i>Response R8</i></p> <p>The recommendation has been implemented.</p> <p>The Health Department’s All Hazards Emergency Operations Plan outlines the strategies and activities the Department Operations Center would initiate in response to large outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics. The plan includes but is not limited to annexes addressing continuity of operations, risk communication, epidemiology and surveillance, mass prophylaxis, and isolation and quarantine. The Department acknowledges that some sections of this plan should be updated and will complete updates by June 30, 2023.</p>	
<b>R9</b>	<b>The County enter Memorandums of Understanding with all hospital systems in Monterey County to establish the terms and conditions for cooperation and resource allocation during a designated countywide medical disaster or infectious disease outbreak by Jun. 30, 2023.</b>
<p><i>Response R9:</i></p> <p>The recommendation requires further analysis and discussion with area hospital systems to determine feasibility of implementing the recommendation.</p>	