

Emergency Preparedness

The Role of Local Law Enforcement Agencies

Released June 17, 2026

SUMMARY

For many years, Humboldt County Civil Grand Juries have focused on disaster preparedness within Humboldt County at the local government and operational area levels. Former juries reviewed the plans, procedures, infrastructure, and organizational preparations in place to address disasters.

This year, the Grand Jury looked at operational preparations, focusing on the boots on the ground. This investigation looked primarily at local law enforcement agencies because they are among the most visible players in local disaster response.

Our three areas of focus were:

- Have Humboldt County emergency plan updates been passed down to law enforcement?
- Did law enforcement have input into emergency plans?
- How well prepared are our local law enforcement first responders for disasters?

The Grand Jury did extensive research on disaster preparedness plans, attended safety presentations and demonstrations, and interviewed several local law enforcement agencies.

The Grand Jury found that Humboldt County's emergency plan updates flow downward well; law enforcement agencies routinely learn of changes. However, they typically don't participate in updating Humboldt County's emergency plans. Local law enforcement agencies are regularly involved in updating local emergency plans.

Organizational and local government-level training is regularly conducted to plan for disasters. The trainings, however, do not include the physical skills required to respond

in real time. A training that simulates an actual disaster event, referred to as scenario-based training, provides opportunities to practice field response skills. Experience employing the skills needed in an emergency situation would further improve disaster preparedness.

Funding for local field response training and for the acquisition and maintenance of specialized emergency/disaster response equipment is an issue for all Humboldt County law enforcement agencies.

Local law enforcement officers know what needs to be done to protect their communities during a disaster. Some of that knowledge and experience isn't always captured in local standard operating procedures; rather, it exists institutionally in the heads of long-term officers.

Local law enforcement officers want to protect and serve their communities effectively during disasters. Still, many simply don't have enough funding or personnel to respond to local disasters, which they believe their communities deserve.

Local law enforcement agencies do the best they can with the limited resources they have.

GLOSSARY

- EOC Emergency Operations Center
- EOP Emergency Operations Plan
- Grand Jury Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury
- ICS Incident Command System
- OES Office of Emergency Services
- CalOES California Office of Emergency Services

BACKGROUND

Three recent Grand Juries issued reports on disaster preparedness:

- Infrastructure and training (2015-2016 term)
- Continuity of operations if the Humboldt County courthouse is directly impacted by a disaster (2017-2018 term)
- Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan and the ability of the County to respond to large-scale disasters (2022-2023 term)

Please refer to Appendix A for summaries of these reports.

Many federal, state, county, and other agencies contributed to the current Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan¹ and Hazard Mitigation Plan. The plans indicate that there was significant input from local fire departments but less from local law enforcement agencies. This lack of input led us to focus on local law enforcement's role in disaster preparedness.

Humboldt County Sheriff's Deputies are responsible for responding to disasters occurring within the unincorporated areas of Humboldt County and in the cities of Blue Lake and Trinidad (these two cities have contracts with the Sheriff's Office to provide all law enforcement services).

Local police officers in the five other cities (Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell) are responsible for responding to disasters occurring within their city limits.

Additional law enforcement resources available during a disaster response are state agencies such as the California Highway Patrol and the Cal Poly Humboldt Police Department, as well as tribal agencies such as the Blue Lake Rancheria Tribal Police Department.

¹ See Appendix B for the Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the Office of Emergency Services (OES), under the Sheriff, are responsible for planning and recovery operations in Humboldt County. In contrast, Sheriff's deputies are tasked with responding to emergencies.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury reviewed over 30 different documents and reference sources, including previous GJ reports, county and local Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs), policy manuals, national and state emergency systems guidelines, and case studies. References for these documents are contained in the Bibliography section, which can be found at the end of this report.

We attended safety presentations and demonstrations by representatives of the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services, the Blue Lake Rancheria Office of Emergency Services, and the Ferndale Police Department.

Interviews were conducted with representatives of the Sheriff's Office and all five municipal police departments in the county. We also spoke with representatives from some state and tribal law enforcement agencies.

DISCUSSION

We reviewed emergency preparedness and training at the field-response level to assess how well-trained and physically prepared local law enforcement agencies are to respond to such incidents. We limited our review to law enforcement rather than all first responders.

We focused on three areas:

- How well have Humboldt County EOP updates on infrastructure, planning, training, and continuity of operations been communicated to local law enforcement agencies for implementation?

- To what extent were there direct inputs into the County EOP updates from local law enforcement agencies?
- How well prepared are local law enforcement agencies to respond to local disasters?

Past Civil Grand Jury reports on disaster preparedness examined the plans and procedures in place by the County and city governments. These prior reports focused on infrastructure and organizational policies implemented before and during a disaster.²

Fire departments are involved in and coordinate with every major disaster response, but law enforcement is often first on the scene and may be the ones to establish incident command.

Equipping law enforcement officers with the skills, supplies, and materials needed to respond to disasters would better prepare them and save more lives.

The Grand Jury interviewed representatives of local law enforcement agencies ranging in size from fewer than 20 to more than 700 personnel. These agencies employ both sworn law enforcement officers and non-sworn community service officers, as well as administrative and support personnel.

The most common takeaways from our interviews are:

- Local law enforcement officers are aware of the unique challenges and requirements of their jurisdictions and the residents they serve. This knowledge is often institutional and resides in the heads of more experienced officers rather than being documented locally in law enforcement agency policies, procedures, or guidance documents. In some cases, the knowledge may be documented, but perhaps only in the shift supervisor's or watch commander's reference material. Line officers may not have access to those reference materials.

² See Appendix A for Previous Grand Jury Reports

Line officers know

- where the most appropriate or available staging areas are within their cities for evacuees, responders, and equipment;
 - which crucial routes need to be blocked to protect citizens from further danger;
 - how to direct citizens to safer areas while keeping access and egress routes open for law enforcement, fire, and EMS first responders; and
 - who to call for assistance (other law enforcement agencies, city departments, and volunteer organizations) when responding to emergencies.
- Local law enforcement officers have the opportunity to provide EOP input to the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services regarding the unique challenges and requirements of their communities. Some of this input comes directly from a representative of a dedicated law enforcement agency, while some comes indirectly through local city managers or council representatives.
 - Local law enforcement officers receive formal training in disaster response. Rather than the specific field response skills they will need in an actual disaster, this training focuses on operational area and local government requirements.
 - All law enforcement officers who have attended a California Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) Basic Academy since 2001 have received training in the Incident Command System (ICS), a core component of California and national disaster response protocols. Until an officer is promoted to a leadership position, this training is not typically practiced or even discussed after graduation from the police academy. Additionally, this training is not included in the Critical/Perishable Skills Training³ for police officers mandated by POST

³ [POST Critical Skills Training](#)

every two years. POST training covers many subjects including communications and use of force.⁴

- Local law enforcement officers would benefit from more scenario-based disaster training, just as scenario-based training for active shooter situations is held regularly. Ideally, training for disasters such as earthquakes will focus specifically on the field response skills and activities required during a real event. Training that includes physical role-playing (instead of table-top exercises)⁵ allows local law enforcement to practice response skills more realistically. Additionally, this type of training will improve coordination with other first responders and the citizens these officers are sworn to serve.
- Local law enforcement agencies typically do not have a representative attending regular Office of Emergency Services meetings due to time constraints or higher-priority obligations.
- Many local law enforcement agencies lack specialized equipment for disasters, such as drones. Having this equipment would improve the timeliness and efficiency of local disaster response. In some cases, this equipment is provided by other agencies (most often by the Sheriff's Office). In other cases, even if they have the specialized emergency/disaster response equipment, law enforcement agencies lack the personnel to operate or the funding to properly maintain it.

The biggest takeaway from our interviews was all about money. The most common challenge we heard was that law enforcement agencies' ability to respond efficiently and effectively to local disasters was hampered by insufficient funding and staffing.

⁴ [California Peace Officer Standards and Training \(POST\)](#)

⁵ A tabletop exercise is a facilitated, discussion-based simulation where key personnel talk through their responses to a mock emergency or crisis in a stress-free, conference-room setting.

LOCAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLANS (EOPs)

Planning is crucial for preparation.

- Is there a plan?
- Does everyone know there is a plan?
- Is everything needed actually written down in the plan?
- Does the plan meet accepted industry response standards?
- Does the plan address local, state, and federal laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the California Emergency Services Act?
- Are responsibilities clearly laid out, not just for law enforcement agencies but for other city agencies as well?

To this end, we reviewed Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) for the five cities in the county that have police departments. All of the reviewed EOPs were designed to meet industry response standards, both to ensure an effective plan and to qualify for government funding.

These emergency operations standards are defined in the National Incident Management System (NIMS),⁶ the California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS),⁷ and the Incident Command System (ICS).⁸

The Incident Command System (ICS) has five essential functions. The field response level uses these functions:

- **Command** is responsible for directing, ordering, and/or controlling resources by virtue of explicit legal, agency, or delegated authority.
- **Operations** is responsible for the coordinated tactical response for all field operations directly applicable to or in support of the mission(s), in accordance with the Incident Action Plan.

⁶ [FEMA National Incident Management System \(NIMS\)](#)

⁷ [Standardized Emergency Management System \(SEMS\)](#)

⁸ ICS is covered in the [2019 Edition Law Enforcement Guide for Emergency Operations](#)

- **Planning/Intelligence** is responsible for the collection, evaluation, documentation, and use of information regarding the incident evaluation and resource status.
- **Logistics** is responsible for providing facilities, services, personnel, equipment, and materials in support of the incident.
- **Finance/Administration** is responsible for all financial and cost analysis aspects of the incident, and for any administrative aspects not handled by the other functions.

All California Peace Officers who have completed a California Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Basic Academy since 2001 have received training on the Incident Command System.⁹

While we found little evidence that local law enforcement agencies provide input to the county EOP, they do participate in developing local EOPs. Local law enforcement agencies are specifically addressed in local EOPs and, in most cases, have contributed to or even authored some of their elements.

Updates to the County EOP and the Humboldt County Hazard Mitigation Plan¹⁰ are communicated to local law enforcement agencies via regularly scheduled meetings. However, local law enforcement agencies rarely participate in developing these updates.

We looked in-depth at emergency plans for all five cities in the county that have municipal police departments (Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell).¹¹ All are EOPs except Rio Dell. While their plan is technically not an EOP, it is an appendix to their city safety plan. The Rio Dell safety plan does not specifically address the Police Department's role in disaster response. However, our interviews showed that

⁹ [California Peace Officer Standards and Training \(POST\)](#)

¹⁰ See Appendix B for the Humboldt County Hazard Mitigation Plan

¹¹ See Appendix C for the Local Emergency Operations Plans

officers of the Rio Dell Police Department are well aware of the unique challenges and requirements of their city.

Whole Community Preparedness is a common guiding principle found in all the reviewed EOPs. This approach aims to develop partnerships with the public, private sector (businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, disability advocates), and government (local, tribal, state, federal). This cooperative effort encourages everyone to prepare for emergencies before disasters happen. By working together, all partners can improve their planning and make sure the city and its institutions understand each other's plans.

CONCLUSION

Our local law enforcement agencies know what needs to be done. They want to protect and serve their communities effectively during disasters. However, they often do not have enough funding or staff to do it as effectively as their communities deserve.

Local law enforcement regularly receives notifications when emergency operations plans are updated at both the local and county levels. While typically providing input when local EOPs are updated, input from local law enforcement is rarely sought when the County EOP is updated. Other local agencies have input on the County plan, but that input does not necessarily provide the local law enforcement perspective.

Our interviews and research revealed that local law enforcement agencies are prepared for disasters but there is room for improvement.

Local law enforcement agencies possess considerable knowledge and experience. They know where staging areas should be located, which routes need to be blocked, how to direct citizens to safety, and who to call for assistance.

Unfortunately, much of the knowledge and experience is not captured in local standard operating procedures. Rather, some of it exists through the experience of long-serving officers. When these officers leave or retire, this knowledge departs with them.

Additionally, we found that most local law enforcement agencies would benefit from more hands-on disaster-response training, particularly in coordinating with other local agencies. As a result of tight budgets and staffing challenges, there are insufficient funds for disaster response training or full-scale disaster simulations.

Local law enforcement agencies do the best they can with the limited resources they have.

FINDINGS

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury finds that:

- F1:** Local law enforcement agencies can provide input into the Humboldt County Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Emergency Operations Plan, but many do not participate. Non-inclusion in the plans may hinder coordination with other first responders during a disaster. **(R1, R2)**
- F2:** Local law enforcement agency representatives typically do not attend regular Office of Emergency Services meetings due to time constraints or higher priority obligations. Irregular participation in these meetings limits their ability to share their experience and may also lead to reduced coordination with other first responders during a disaster. **(R1, R2)**
- F3:** Local government representatives (such as city managers) who do attend the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services meetings may not provide input from a law enforcement perspective. This lack of input can result in the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services not being fully aware of the priorities and requirements of local law enforcement agencies as it updates the Hazard Mitigation and Emergency Operations Plans. **(R1, R2)**
- F4:** The unique disaster response needs of local communities are known by experienced officers, but are not always articulated in local law enforcement agency disaster response documentation. As a result, new or less experienced officers may not have access to this information. **(R3)**

- F5:** Incident Command System training is a core component of California and national emergency response protocols, but is typically received by law enforcement officers only when they are at the police academy. This knowledge degrades without refresher training. **(R4, R5, R6, R7, R8)**
- F6:** Scenario-based Incident Command System training is not regularly conducted due to staffing constraints and budgetary limitations. As a result, local law enforcement officers may not be adequately trained in their disaster-response roles. **(R4, R5, R6, R7, R8)**
- F7:** When held, scenario-based disaster response training typically focuses on agency coordination, mitigation, and planning, but often does not include the actual activities that need to be performed during a real event. As a result, law enforcement officers may not be adequately trained on the specific skills needed to respond to disasters in their communities. **(R4, R5, R6, R7, R8)**
- F8:** Some specialized disaster response equipment is unavailable or not adequately maintained by local law enforcement agencies due to budgetary limitations. As a result, these agencies may be unable to respond effectively or efficiently to local disasters. **(R9)**
- F9:** Availability of specialized disaster response equipment is less of an issue for the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office. This allows them to respond to local disasters more effectively themselves and to serve as a potential source of equipment for local agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1:** The Humboldt County Sheriff direct Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services to encourage participation by law enforcement agencies in regular meetings by including standing law enforcement agency-relevant agenda items to gather input for the emergency plans by no later than December 31, 2026. **(F1, F2, F3)**

- R2:** The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell direct their Police Chiefs to designate representatives to attend the regular meetings and provide input to the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services by no later than December 31, 2026. **(F1, F2, F3)**
- R3:** The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell direct their Police Chiefs to ensure that a complete list of local disaster response needs, priorities, and protocols is included in their individual city disaster response documentation by no later than March 31, 2027. **(F4)**
- R4:** The Humboldt County Sheriff request the addition of scenario-based Incident Command System Field Response Training as a separate line item within the FY 2027-2028 Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Training Budget. **(F5, F6, F7)**
- R5:** The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors add scenario-based Incident Command System Field Response Training as a separate line item within the FY 2027-2028 Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Training Budget. **(F5, F6, F7)**

Funding Recommendation: The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors fund the expenses listed in **R5** with existing appropriations in the next fiscal year. If current appropriations are not sufficient, the Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors, at its earliest opportunity, pursue additional funding from an appropriate organization, including state or federal agencies.

Additionally, the Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors reassess funding priorities to give greater priority to all areas of emergency management and response within Humboldt County.

- R6:** The Humboldt County Sheriff add scenario-based Incident Command System Field Response Training for Sheriff's Office staff to the regular training schedule by no later than July 1, 2028. **(F5, F6, F7)**

- R7:** The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell, after consultation with their respective police chiefs, add scenario-based ICS Field Response Training as a separate line item within the FY 2027-2028 local police department budget. **(F5, F6, F7)**
- R8:** The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell direct their Police Chiefs to add scenario-based ICS Field Response Training to their regular training schedule, by no later than July 1, 2028. **(F5, F6, F7)**
- R9:** The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell, after consultation with their respective police chiefs, add specialized disaster response equipment, maintenance, and training/certification as separate line items within the FY 2027-2028 local Police Department Budget. **(F8)**

Funding Recommendation: The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that local City Councils fund the expenses listed in **R7 and R9** with existing appropriations in the current fiscal year. If current appropriations are not sufficient, the Grand Jury recommends that City Councils, at their earliest opportunity, pursue additional funding from an appropriate organization, including state or federal agencies.

Additionally, the Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that local city councils reassess funding priorities to give greater priority to all areas of emergency management and response within their respective cities.

RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, each entity or individual named below must respond to the enumerated Findings and Recommendations within specific statutory guidelines.

Responses to Findings shall be either:

- The respondent agrees with the finding; or

- 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.

Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:

- The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action; or
- The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation, or
- The recommendation requires further analysis, including an explanation, the scope and parameters of the analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency, where applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of the publication of the Grand Jury report; or
- The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

REQUIRED RESPONSE – WITHIN 90 DAYS

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

(F5, F6, F7) and (R5)

The Arcata City Council

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

The Eureka City Council

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

The Ferndale City Council

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

The Fortuna City Council

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

The Rio Dell City Council

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

REQUIRED RESPONSE – WITHIN 60 DAYS

The Humboldt County Sheriff

(F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F9) and (R1, R4, R6)

Invited Responses

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury also invites the following entities or individuals to respond.

The Arcata Police Department Chief of Police

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

The Eureka Police Department Chief of Police

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

The Ferndale Police Department Chief of Police

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

The Fortuna Police Department Chief of Police

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

The Rio Dell Police Department Chief of Police

(All findings) and (R2, R3, R7, R8, R9)

Responses are to be sent to both:

The Honorable Judge Timothy A. Canning
California Superior Court for Humboldt County
825 5th Street, Eureka, CA 95501

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury
PO Box 657; Eureka, CA 95502 A

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury researched over 30 different documents and reference sources.

- Previous Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury Reports released 2015 - 2025
[Archive Center Civil Grand Jury Reports](#)
- The National Incident Management System (NIMS), Third Edition, dated October 2017, published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
[FEMA National Incident Management System](#)
- The Law Enforcement Guide for Emergency Operations, 2019 Edition, published by the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES).
The guide covers the Incident Command System (ICS) in detail.
[2019 Edition Law Enforcement Guide for Emergency Operations](#)
- The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), Learning Domain 26, Critical Incidents, Version 4.0, last revised July 2025
[Learning Domain 26 Critical Incidents](#)
- The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), Perishable Skills Program Version 4.0, last revised July 2021
[Perishable Skills Program](#)
- The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), published in January 2010 by the California Emergency Management Agency
[Standardized Emergency Management System](#)
- The Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), dated March 2015, published by the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services (OES)
[Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan](#)

- The Humboldt County Operational Area Hazard Mitigation Plan, July 2025 Draft, Volumes 1 and 2
[Humboldt County Operational Area Hazard Mitigation Plan Volume 1](#)
[Humboldt County Operational Area Hazard Mitigation Plan Volume 2](#)
- The Humboldt County Continuity of Government Plan, undated, published to the Humboldt County Website on April 9, 2025
[Humboldt County Continuity of Government Plan](#)
- The Emergency Operations Plan for the City of Arcata, dated January 2021 (see also Appendix C)
[Emergency Operations Plan for the City of Arcata](#)
- The Emergency Operations Plan for the City of Eureka, dated 2025 (see also Appendix C)
[Emergency Operations Plan for the City of Eureka](#)
- The Emergency Response Handbook for the City of Ferndale, dated January 1, 2022 (see also Appendix C)
[Emergency Response Handbook for the City of Ferndale](#)
- The Emergency Operations Plan for the City of Fortuna, dated 2021 (see also Appendix C) Note that Fortuna does not publish their EOP on their website. The city's emergency procedures are governed under the county-wide framework and can be viewed on the county website.
[Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan](#)
- The Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Policy Manual, dated October 10, 2025, published by the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office
[Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Policy Manual](#)
- The Arcata Police Department Policy Manual, dated April 20, 2022, was published by the Arcata Police Department
[Arcata Police Department Policy Manual](#)

- The Eureka Police Department Policy Manual, dated June 10, 2025, published by the Eureka Police Department

[Eureka Police Department Policy Manual](#)

- The Ferndale Police Department Policy Manual, dated May 31, 2022, was published by the Ferndale Police Department

[Ferndale Police Department Policy Manual](#)

The Grand Jury also researched national and international sources on case studies and best practices for disaster response by first responders. The majority of these references cited the importance of local law enforcement agencies and personnel in disaster response.

APPENDIX A: Previous Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury Reports

2015-2016

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury published a report finding the overall condition of the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services (OES) in need of upgrades to plan better for the emergencies to come.¹² The Grand Jury was pleased to find that the personnel involved in emergency planning were well-trained and highly qualified. In May of 2016, personnel from various departments within the County attended Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) training in Maryland, specifically designed for a significant event in our County. The OES facilities at the time were outdated and insufficient to meet the training needs for a future disaster. The most recent training in Humboldt County at that time had to take place in Fortuna because it had an available location large enough to accommodate the staffing requirements.

The 2015-2016 report also found that dispatching and communicating emergency needs in Humboldt County were split among various agencies serving the County. There were five different dispatch centers in the County, all providing similar services. Several of the dispatch centers did not use compatible software or follow the same procedures. It also found that hiring and retaining qualified emergency response dispatchers was difficult and all agencies reported a heavy reliance on overtime to staff necessary positions. Dispatchers were not cross-trained across agencies and were unable to fill scheduling gaps. It was noted that other counties of similar size to Humboldt had consolidated their dispatch centers to provide greater service at cost savings. Responses to the 2015-2016 report were received

¹² [Earthquake, Flood, Tsunami: Is Humboldt County Ready?](#)

from many different local agencies.^{13,14,15,16,17,18} The response from the Fire Chiefs' Association of Humboldt County was particularly detailed.¹⁹

2017-2018

The 2017-2018 Grand Jury published a report focusing on how prepared the county is to respond to an emergency within its facilities.²⁰ Due to time constraints, the 2017-2018 Grand Jury limited its investigation to the Humboldt County Courthouse. They found the Emergency Action Plan for the Humboldt County Courthouse had not been modified for over 15 years. It contained outdated personnel assignments, was applied inconsistently, and was unknown to many employees. In addition, emergency evacuation signage was missing from many locations within the courthouse. The result of these deficiencies was that both county employees and visitors were exposed to a higher risk of injury or death due to outdated emergency planning. Responses to the 2017-2018 report were received from the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors²¹ and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office.²²

2022- 2023

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury published a report focusing on how well Humboldt County was prepared to respond to multi-disaster events.²³

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury found no evidence that Humboldt County had completed an update of the master Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) since its publication in 2015. The Humboldt County Sheriff's Department, Office of

¹³ [Earthquakes - Response - HCSO](#)

¹⁴ [Earthquakes - Response - Arcata PD](#)

¹⁵ [Earthquakes - Response - LAFCo](#)

¹⁶ [Earthquakes - Response - BOS](#)

¹⁷ [Earthquakes - Response - EPD](#)

¹⁸ [Earthquakes - Response - Fortuna PD](#)

¹⁹ [Earthquakes - Response - Fire Chief's Association](#)

²⁰ [GJ Report: Know Where to Run, Know Where to Hide - Emergency Plan](#)

²¹ [Emergency Plan - Response - BOS](#)

²² [Emergency Plan - Response - HCSO](#)

²³ [GJ Report: Humboldt County Emergency Preparedness: Ready or Not?](#)

Emergency Services (OES), is charged with emergency preparedness planning. The OES intended to update and rewrite the EOP over the next two years.

Both the Disaster Council and OES were created by the same County ordinance in 2011. The OES is under the control of the elected Humboldt County Sheriff. The Sheriff is designated as Humboldt County's overall Director of Emergency Services and is a mandated member of the Disaster Council. The Disaster Council's function is to advise the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and oversee the EOP.

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury found no evidence that the Disaster Council, an advisory and oversight body, had met since 2015. Moreover, they could find no one who could provide them with a current roster of its members.

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury concluded that the Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff had been lax in their responsibility to maintain a comprehensive plan for responding to large-scale disasters. Responses to the 2022-2023 Grand Jury Report were received from the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors²⁴ and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office.²⁵

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury concluded that private businesses and various first-responder agencies and departments appeared to respond adequately to emergencies. However, it did not indicate the quality or quantity of direct input to the Humboldt County Hazard Mitigation Plan or the Emergency Operations Plan.

²⁴ [Emergency Preparedness - Response - HCSO](#)

²⁵ [Sheriff's Office Response](#)

APPENDIX B: Humboldt County HMP and EOP

Humboldt County Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP)

The Humboldt County Hazard Mitigation Plan is designed to meet the Operational Area organization response as defined in National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS).

Hazard mitigation is the use of long- and short-term policies, programs, projects, and other activities to reduce the loss of life, injury, and property damage resulting from a disaster. Humboldt County and a partnership of local governments within the operational area developed the Hazard Mitigation Plan to reduce risks from natural disasters in the Humboldt County Operational Area—defined as the unincorporated county, incorporated cities, and special purpose districts planning partners authorized to govern, develop, or regulate. The plan complies with federal and state hazard mitigation planning requirements, establishing eligibility for funding under Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant programs for all planning partners.

The Plan is comprehensive and covers the unincorporated county, the Cities of Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell, and Trinidad. It also includes 23 special-purpose districts within the county.

Stakeholders and planning partners for this plan include:

- The Emergency Services Manager for the County of Humboldt
- An Environmental Services Director, Public Works Directors, and City Managers for the cities of Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell, and Trinidad
- General Managers and an Engineering Manager of 11 special - purpose districts
- Fire, Division, and Deputy Chiefs of 4 Fire Protection Districts

While it can be inferred that local first responders had some indirect input through city managers, there is no evidence to that effect.

Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

The Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan is designed to meet the Local Government organization response as defined in NIMS and SEMS.

The Humboldt County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) addresses the planned response to extraordinary emergency situations associated with natural disasters, technological incidents, and human-caused disasters in or affecting Humboldt County.

This Plan is designed to establish the framework for implementation of the California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS) for Humboldt County, which is located within the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) Mutual Aid Region II. It is intended to facilitate multiagency and multijurisdictional coordination, particularly between Humboldt County and local governments, including special districts and state agencies in emergency operations.

This document is operational in design and serves a secondary purpose as a planning reference. Departments within the County and local governments that have roles and responsibilities identified in this Plan are encouraged to develop emergency operations plans, detailed standard operating procedures, and emergency response checklists based on the provisions within this Plan.

APPENDIX C: Local Emergency Operations Plans

City of Eureka Emergency Operations Plan (last updated 2025)²⁶

The Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) explains how the City of Eureka, including its government, partner agencies, community organizations, businesses, and residents, works together to respond to major emergencies and disasters. The EOP outlines strategies and plans for handling complex and potentially severe events when city resources and departments are stretched thin. The Plan is meant to be flexible and encourages the use of good judgment and common sense.

The Eureka Plan complies with the California Emergency Services Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to protect residents' lives, property, and the environment.

Clearly defined primary and secondary emergency response responsibilities to each city department are assigned and include:

- Conduct law enforcement operations
- Lead evacuation operations
- Conduct emergency public warning as needed
- Provide facility and resource security
- Establish liaison with the coroner
- Lead coordination of mutual aid
- Impose and enforce curfew as directed
- Provide public safety and security support
- Provide traffic control

²⁶ <https://www.eurekaca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7111/EOP-2025-Final-Draft>

- Provide support for access, traffic management, and crowd control at mass care facilities

Secondary law enforcement responsibilities include:

- Conduct security planning and technical resource assistance
- Support damage assessment efforts
- Provide incident planning and management support as needed
- Search and rescue operations
- Disseminate public information
- Participate in recovery
- Post-event evaluation of all plans

City of Arcata Emergency Operations Plan (last updated 2021)²⁷

The plan aims to:

- Identify and address existing and potential hazards affecting the City of Arcata.
- Anticipate and plan for resident and visitor needs during emergencies.
- Articulate protection measures for people and property during disasters.
- Provide a framework for Arcata response personnel's actions using the Incident Command System (ICS).
- Identify external partners:
 - County of Humboldt (coordination)
 - Fire services (emergency response)
 - Utilities (infrastructure management)
 - Community groups and volunteers (community support)
 - American Red Cross (disaster relief)

²⁷ <https://www.cityofarcata.org/241/Emergency-Preparedness>

- Arcata Community Emergency Response Team
- Establish lines of authority and organizational relationships among the external partners.
- Outline systems for collaborative communication throughout incidents.
- Identify personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies, and other resources available within the jurisdiction for use during response and recovery operations.
- Support the city's objectives for response and recovery, and acknowledge planning assumptions.

The City of Arcata EOP categorizes hazards, provides the relative risk levels for each hazard to the city, and defines priorities for addressing them. The Arcata EOP identifies the 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-choice options for filling activated positions within the Emergency Operations Center with law enforcement officers designated to fill many of them.

The Arcata EOP also provides checklists that clearly define the responsibilities for positions activated in the Emergency Operations Center, ensuring that everyone knows the requirements and expectations for their role.

City of Fortuna Emergency Operations Plan (last updated 2021)

The City of Fortuna EOP details responses to extraordinary emergencies arising from natural or human-caused incidents (e.g., technological, terrorist, civil unrest). The Plan describes emergency management operations and assigns response roles to specific personnel and departments.

Departments, agencies, and volunteer organizations with roles defined by this Plan develop standard operating plans and emergency checklists in accordance with its provisions. This Plan is meant to be used with local contingency plans, the Humboldt County EOP, and the California State EOP.

Three parts span all five phases of emergency management (prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery):

- Part 1 - Basic Plan. This part outlines Fortuna's emergency management structure and organization. It identifies roles and responsibilities, describes emergency operations, and explains how the city implements SEMS and NIMS as required by federal and state entities.
- Part 2 - Emergency Functions. These sections outline functions defined by the National Response Framework and the State of California. Each has been tailored to address Fortuna's specific needs and gives general guidance on operations and components.
- Part 3 - EOC Management and Position Guides. This section provides an introduction to the EOC management positions and sections. It also includes the EOC position guides in checklist format, detailing emergency actions for increased readiness, initial activation, extended operations, and post-emergency documentation. These guides provide position-specific guidance to support staff within Fortuna's emergency management organizational structure.

In support of emergency management, the Fortuna Plan

- outlines methods and procedures for emergency management personnel to assess emergencies and take action to save lives, reduce injuries, minimize property damage, and protect the environment;
- provides emergency information throughout the emergency, including personal protective actions for the public;
- develops a whole-community approach to emergency management that facilitates an inclusive response;
- defines the operational concepts and procedures for the EOC's interface with field emergency responders and its coordination with city departments, personnel, and systems;

- identifies the organizational framework for managing and coordinating emergency operations in the city by implementing the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS);
- identifies the responsibilities of local, state, and federal agencies during an emergency or disaster affecting the city;
- identifies mutual aid to supplement local resources;
- facilitates multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional coordination, especially among local government, the operational area, state response levels, and appropriate federal agencies during emergency operations;
- outlines the functions and components the city must have in place to respond to and resolve emergencies effectively;
- provides an operational plan and a reference document, and can also be used for pre-emergency planning and emergency operations; and
- provides information for training emergency response personnel and local government staff to efficiently and effectively prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters.

City of Ferndale Emergency Operations Plan (last updated 2022)²⁸

The City of Ferndale Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) outlines the City's emergency planning, organization, policies, procedures, and response to extraordinary emergencies arising from natural disasters, technological incidents, and national security emergencies. The Plan also addresses integration and coordination with other levels of government when required.

This Emergency Operations Plan covers the following key points:

²⁸ <https://ci.ferndale.ca.us/wp-content/uploads/Emergency-Response-Handbook-for-website.pdf>

- Urgent mobilization of the emergency management organization is required to confront and resolve any significant emergency or disaster threatening the City of Ferndale.
- Identification of the responsibilities, policies, and procedures necessary to safeguard the health and safety of the Ferndale population.
- Identification of the necessary actions to protect both public and private property and to address environmental dangers posed by natural and technological emergencies and disasters.
- Definition of core operational concepts and procedural steps for field emergency response, including:
 - Coordination of activities within the Fortuna Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
 - Identification of communication channels and command structures
 - Planning the transitions between the response and recovery phases

This Plan complies with the functions and principles of SEMS, ICS, and NIMS. These systems show how Ferndale's emergency operations fit into the California system during response and recovery. This Plan focuses on functions, not staff numbers. One person may need to perform all functions as needed. During a major event, more staff can be assigned to each function, allowing an appropriate response.