

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

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August 3, 2010

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San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury
P. O. Box 4910
San Luis Obispo, California 93402

IN RE: GRAND JURY INVESTIGATIVE REPORT: *EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESPONSE*

Dear San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury:

First, please allow me to begin by stating, the mission of the California Highway Patrol (CHP) is to provide the highest level of safety, service, and security to the people of California. This is accomplished through five departmental goals:

1. Prevent Loss of Life, Injuries, and Property Damage
2. Maximize Service to the Public and Assistance to Allied Agencies
3. Manage Traffic and Emergency Incidents
4. Protect Public and State Assets
5. Improve Departmental Efficiency

To assist in the fulfillment of this mission, the CHP operates a helicopter based out of the Paso Robles Airport, located in San Luis Obispo County. First, however, a little context will be helpful. The CHP divides the State of California into eight geographical regions, referred to as Divisions. The Central Coast region is aptly named Coastal Division. Coastal Division stretches from Santa Cruz County in the north to Ventura County in the south, with Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara Counties filling in the middle. The Coastal Division regional headquarters is located in San Luis Obispo near the airport.

While the patrol officer remains the foundation of the CHP, additional support from various units within Coastal Division augment the CHP's life-saving mission. The Coastal Division Air Operations Unit provides advanced life support (ALS) rescue and transportation, technical search and rescue operations, criminal surveillance, pursuit intervention, aerial photography, blood and organ transportation, homeland security, and emergency transportation of personnel and equipment. This highly specialized unit

operates two Cessna 206 airplanes and one A-Star 350 B3 helicopter. The Coastal Division helicopter's designation is H-70.

H-70 is typically staffed with a pilot and a flight officer/paramedic. All unit personnel are, first and foremost, fully-trained CHP officers. The ultimate purpose of the helicopter is to assist in fulfilling the mission of the CHP.

After reviewing the 2009–2010 San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury's Investigative Report titled *Emergency Medical Response*, there are a number of items that require redress.

As the only agency with an Emergency Medical Services (EMS)/ALS aircraft stationed in San Luis Obispo County, the CHP is actively involved in many aspects of emergency medical response within the county. Unfortunately, as the Grand Jury's methodology stated on page 4 of the Investigative Report, there was zero input from any members of this Department. Therefore, all Findings and Recommendations made by the Grand Jury were done exclusive of any input from the CHP. As a Department, we welcome the opportunity to provide input and extend an open invitation to the Grand Jury to visit Coastal Division headquarters as well as our Air Operations Unit at any time.

Finding 6 contains the very strong statement that, "Sometimes the CHP does not answer the phone creating delays in helicopter dispatch." This statement is wholly inaccurate and has taken on a spurious nature since being published. The CHP believes there is merit in the Grand Jury's conclusion that, "Policies must be revised or new procedures implemented to reduce excessive time delays and confusion in dispatching." In the Recommendations Section I have taken the opportunity to provide workable solutions for improvement. First, please permit me to clarify key differences in the two local helicopter operations that were overlooked in the report and may have contributed to the misconception that the CHP does not answer the phone:

On the surface, it appears that ETAs are easily obtained from CALSTAR VII, but are more difficult to determine from the CHP. To understand why this is so, it must be noted that CALSTAR contracts its dispatching services through the Cal Fire/San Luis Obispo County Fire Department's Emergency Command Center (ECC). The ECC uses mapping software to track the status of all units, including the CALSTAR VII helicopter. Using CALSTAR VII's known location, typically at the Santa Maria Airport in Santa Barbara County, the ECC is quickly able to provide an ETA to San Luis Obispo Medical Communications (MedCom) when requested. MedCom is responsible for dispatching all EMS aircraft. One problem with this system is that, unlike ground fire apparatus, a helicopter is vulnerable to considerable limitations, especially meteorological conditions. So, when the ECC provides an ETA of 20 minutes for CALSTAR VII, this is done without initially contacting the on-duty CALSTAR VII staff. This is *not* an accurate time and explains instances where CALSTAR was committed to an emergency response call only to learn that they were actually on a patient transfer, or were down for mechanical reasons, or did not respond to a tone, or did not have a nurse available, or inclement weather prevented flying. The CHP

is susceptible to these same limitations, so, rather than a critique on CALSTAR, it is a critique on any system of dispatch that does not rely on direct contact with the flight crew in obtaining an ETA. The ECC's mapping system is limited with respect to helicopter launch because it does not know the true availability of the helicopter. While it can be reasonably presumed that any given fire engine shown in quarters is fully available for immediate response, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to a helicopter response.

This is precisely the reason MedCom contacts the CHP crew directly to obtain an ETA. This method of contact ensures that a pilot provides MedCom with a very accurate response time, giving due consideration to all relevant factors. This is a true ETA.

It is the CHP's contention that a true ETA can only be obtained through direct contact with the flight crew and it is, therefore, unrealistic to consider the ECC's mapping ETA as valid without first confirming the ETA with the flight crew. There is no substitute for talking to the crew. This is a decision ultimately in the best interest of the patient.

The CHP has been in discussion with CalFire concerning the development of a "fence" that essentially bifurcates the county (**Enclosure 1**, prepared by Cal Fire). In so doing, MedCom could initially launch the aircraft that is closest based on estimated launch and flight times and then later confirm the ETA. However, this proposal is subject to all the aforementioned limitations. First and foremost, it makes assumptions, and unverified assumptions may well place patient care in peril. For example, the CHP could be autolaunched for a collision on Highway 46 at the "Y," while CALSTAR VII is on a return flight from Stanford with an ETA of only 6 minutes. Or, CALSTAR VII could be autolaunched for a call at Lake Lopez when the CHP is already on routine patrol in the vicinity. CALSTAR VII could be autolaunched to a call on Highway 166, but be unable to takeoff due to fog (or a similar scenario could occur *visa versa*). The possibilities are myriad but the solution is obvious: aircraft require a direct commitment from the crew prior to being affirmatively assigned to a rescue. The CHP supports a system of dispatch which relies on direct contact with the flight crew in obtaining an accurate ETA based on present conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DISPATCHING

Under Recommendation 1, the Investigative Report stated, "SLOEMSA should revise their procedures so dispatchers are able to launch the helicopter with the shortest ETA. If one service cannot be immediately contacted the first available should be sent." This policy is already in place and has been for some time. However, the CHP makes the following recommendation to ensure the rapid and accurate determination of ETAs. The County should provide alpha-numeric pagers to both CALSTAR VII and H-70. This system is already in place for all

ground ambulance services. MedCom has confirmed the ease with which the system could be implemented.

In the event that a helicopter response is warranted, a message will be simultaneously broadcast to both pagers. It will then be incumbent upon both aircrews to determine an ETA and provide that information as soon as possible to MedCom. ETAs should be received by MedCom within three minutes of broadcast. This is a clean and simple process that follows already established procedures, eliminates confusion, and alleviates pressure on communication center staff. The attached flowchart (**Enclosure 2**) details the current procedure used by MedCom when contacting the CHP. Once pagers are implemented, then the procedures on (**Enclosure 3**) would be followed.

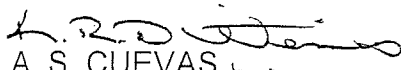
STATUS REPORTS

The CHP already contacts MedCom by radio whenever going in service, out of service, or when providing service in another county. In an effort to enhance communication between the CHP and MedCom, the CHP will implement a system where the CHP sends daily messages detailing the crew status directly to the MedCom mnemonic via the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS). This will greatly increase and simplify the flow of information between the two agencies.

CONCLUSION

The California Highway Patrol remains steadfastly committed to the citizens of San Luis Obispo County when it comes to providing them with professional, pre-hospital emergency care. We welcome this opportunity to provide clarity on how we may improve our services and best meet the needs of those we serve. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Captain Sean McRae or me at, 805-549-3261.

Sincerely,

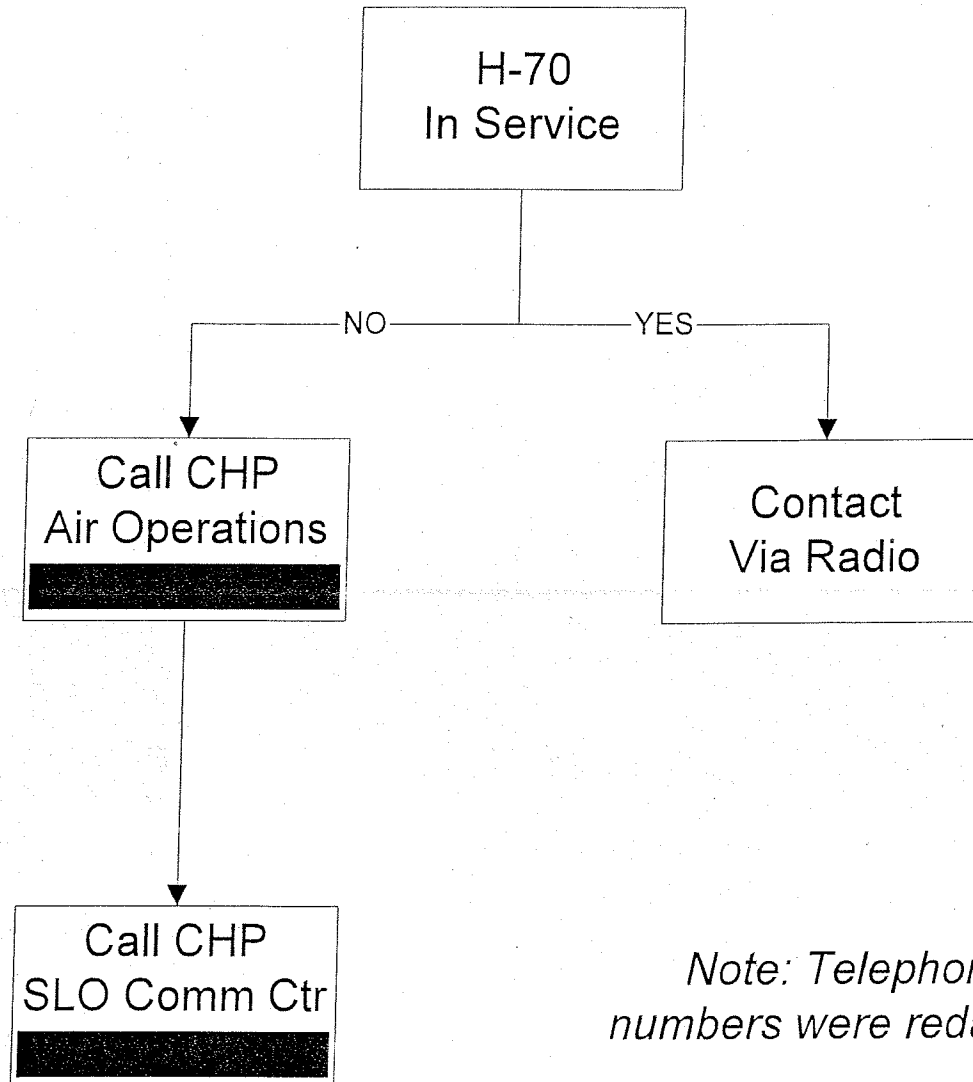

A. S. CUEVAS
Chief

Enclosures



California Highway Patrol

H-70 Med Comm Contact Decision Tree



Note: Telephone numbers were redacted.

Contact Numbers:

Pager

[REDACTED]

Mobile Phone

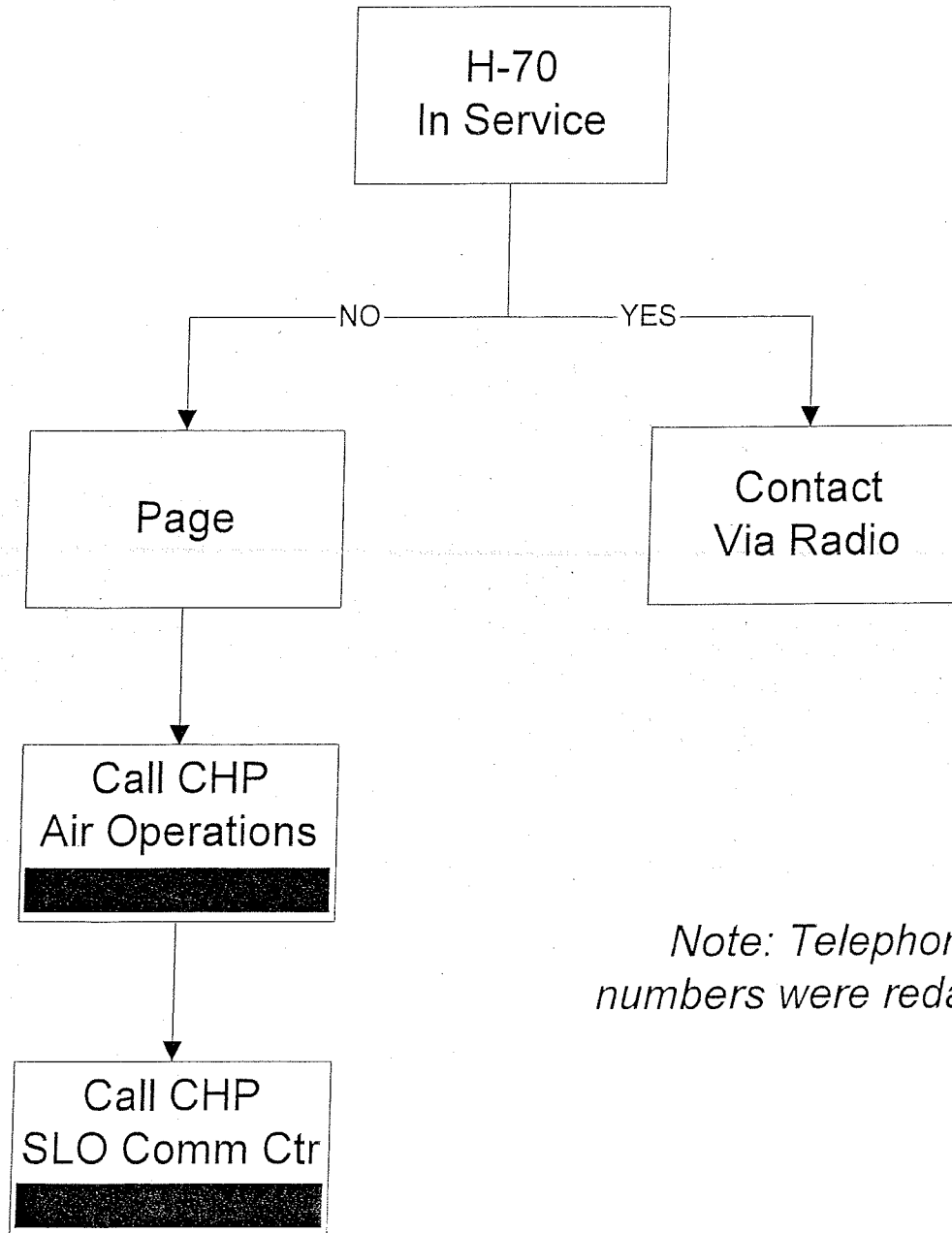
[REDACTED]

Satellite Phone
Access Code

[REDACTED]

California Highway Patrol

H-70 Med Comm Contact Decision Tree



Note: Telephone numbers were redacted.

Contact Numbers:

Pager
Mobile Phone
Satellite Phone
Access Code

