

NAPA COUNTY  
RESPONSE TO THE GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT ON  
EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEMS

August 14, 2018

**Finding 1:** The fires that ravaged the North Bay during October 2017 were the most destructive in our history. Given the dry, ferocious winds, warm temperatures, and our natural landscape, fires were predictable. Yet, there were no Nixle alerts preceding the fires.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* The Napa County Executive Officer agrees with this finding.

**Finding 2:** Reliance on the Nixle cellular communications platform proved to be insufficient in warning Napa County residents in a timely and accurate way. A small percentage of residents, and very few visitors, were registered, and for those in the danger areas, it became moot as the cell infrastructure quickly became inoperable.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* The Napa County Executive Officer disagrees in part with this finding. Messages sent on October 8, 2017 and thereafter during the Napa Fires Complex in October of 2017 were timely and accurate. However, it was not anticipated that cell towers would fail causing messages to be not received.

**Finding 3:** The understaffed OES personnel was initially hampered by the fire's fury and location, causing delay in issuing the first Nixle alert.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* The Napa County Executive Officer disagrees with this finding. County OES staff responded immediately, followed by full staffing of the County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The first Nixle message was delivered by the City of Napa at 11:00 pm followed by messages from the County's EOC starting at 11:31 pm. Response time and situational awareness of what was occurring in the field was required before reliable messages could be issued.

**Finding 4:** While Napa County OES, the Sheriff's Department, the Fire Department, and other public safety agencies' have developed versions of disaster action and hazard mitigation plans, information about emergency alerts and warnings from these agencies is lacking.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* The Napa County Executive Officer disagrees with this finding. Napa County has a functional Emergency Operations Plan that includes disaster action plans and information about emergency alerts and warnings. The Hazard Mitigation Plan does not include an emergency response component. A Hazard Mitigation Plan as defined is a plan to address and take action to reduce or eliminate the long term risk to life and property from

hazard events. While emergency response tools can be addressed in a Hazard Mitigation Plan, plans and strategies for responding to a disaster event are not.

**Finding 5:** Since power, Internet and cell towers were lost in many areas of Napa County, local radio station KVON provided a valuable platform for fire updates, evacuation locations, and critical information from public officials.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* The Napa County Executive Officer agrees with this finding.

*Response, Board of Supervisors:* The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

**Finding 6:** Proposed legislation in Sacramento is focused on numerous issues regarding disaster planning, including standardizing the approach to alerts since many disasters cross county lines.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* The Napa County Executive Officer agrees with this finding.

*Response, Board of Supervisors:* The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

**Finding 7:** The professional, coordinated and extraordinary response by Napa County OES, law enforcement and fire personnel, focused on saving lives and livestock, resulted in minimal loss of life despite what the Napa County Fire Chief described as a “once in a lifetime” fire.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* The Napa County Executive Officer agrees with this finding.

*Response, Board of Supervisors:* The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** Nixle or other alerts should always be sent out when there is an official red flag weather warning. The Napa County OES manager should investigate automating this capability in certain severe situations. Additionally, when this type of warning goes out, there should be notification sent to the Emergency Operations Center team to be prepared to turn up the center in the event a fire or other disaster erupts. Both recommendations should be addressed by October 31, 2018.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* This recommendation has been implemented, to the extent feasible. Napa County OES has implemented a plan to provide community alerts and messages whenever a Red Flag Warning is issued by the National Weather Service. Emergency messaging cannot be fully automated and does require action from staff. Preparation and early

notification of the County's Emergency Operations Center staff has always been County practice and that will continue.

**Recommendation 2:** Napa County OES should lead the effort to order and deploy iPaws, which will enable use of Wireless Emergency Alerts, throughout Napa County now that the FCC has mandated that it be improved. Further, OES should develop a check list and detailed procedures to coordinate its use among the multiple alert platforms and operators by December 31, 2018.

*Response, Napa County Executive Officer:* This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. The County IPAWS application was submitted on February 1, 2018 and was approved on July 13, 2018. Implementation, training and procedures development is underway and will be completed in fall 2018.

**Recommendation 3:** Napa County should investigate or commission plans to deploy where feasible other alert and warning technologies such as mobile and fixed sirens, aerial drones, etc. to reach more residents in the event of power or cellular communications loss of service by March 31, 2019.

*Response, Board of Supervisors:* This recommendation has been implemented. County staff, including County OES, County Fire and Sheriff, are investigating feasible warning technologies. The Sheriff has already implemented a high/low siren system on its patrol units and training in the community is already underway beginning with the Berryessa Highland neighborhood during the Steele Fire and will continue throughout the County. Because these technologies are continually evolving, County staff will monitor them on a regular basis.

**Recommendation 4:** Increase staffing for Napa County Office of Emergency Services through grants or reallocation of budgets for emergency response planning, education and training, and to update and expand written alert and warning policies and procedures on the appropriate public websites by June 30, 2019.

*Response, Board of Supervisors:* The recommendation requires further analysis. County staff is currently evaluating the appropriate need and budgeting for additional staff for County OES.

**Recommendation 5:** Napa County should negotiate an agreement, in conjunction with the County's municipalities, to formally incorporate plans to utilize local radio station KVON into existing and future Disaster and Hazard mitigation plans in the County by June 30, 2019.

*Response, Board of Supervisors:* The Napa County Executive Officer agrees with this recommendation. Discussions with the radio station are underway.