



A Tradition of Stewardship
A Commitment to Service

Agenda Date: 3/16/2020

Agenda Placement: 7C

Napa County Legislative Subcommittee Board Agenda Letter

TO: Napa County Legislative Subcommittee
FROM: Mary Booher for Minh Tran - County Executive Officer
County Executive Office
REPORT BY: Nelson Cortez, Staff Assistant-BOS - 7072991478
SUBJECT: SB 909 (Dodd) - Hi-Lo Audible Warning Alarms

RECOMMENDATION

Napa County Sheriff requests discussion and possible action on SB 909 (Dodd) a bill that allows local municipalities to equip emergency vehicles with a Hi-Lo audible warning alarm for notifying residents of mandatory evacuations during an emergency.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the 2017 wildfires that devastated Napa County and surrounding areas, the Napa County Sheriff conducted a 2-year pilot program to use Hi-Lo sirens to notify residents of mandatory evacuations during an emergency. This bill would codify the use of hi-lo sirens by removing the need for the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to approve on a case-by-case basis and instead authorize local agencies to use such sirens during an emergency.

The Napa County Sheriff is sponsoring this legislation and will be available to answer questions from the Subcommittee.

Staff recommends the committee forward this bill to the Board of Supervisors with a recommended support position.

FISCAL & STRATEGIC PLAN IMPACT

Is there a Fiscal Impact? No

County Strategic Plan pillar addressed:

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: The proposed action is not a project as defined by 14 California Code of Regulations 15378 (State CEQA Guidelines) and therefore CEQA is not applicable.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION**Synopsis**

SB 909 by Senator Dodd would authorize an emergency vehicle to be equipped with a “Hi-Lo” sirens and would allow the siren to be used for the purpose of notifying the public of an immediate need to evacuate.

Background***Current law***

Neither the Vehicle Code nor the California Code of Regulations currently allow emergency vehicles to be equipped with the Hi-Lo siren without permission for “experimental equipment” from the California Highway Patrol.

SB 909 removes the requirement that the CHP must authorize the use of alternate audible warnings on a case-by-case basis and gives local agencies the ability to utilize these tools in an emergency.

Need for the bill, according to the author

Following 2017 wildfires, the Napa County Sheriff concluded that first responders needed a new way to alert the community about mandatory evacuations in effect.

Traditional police sirens are too common to be used and the older air-raid sirens often lead to more confusion. The Napa County Sheriff decided that the Hi-Lo audible warning, as commonly heard on European first responder vehicles, would be a practical solution. The department was granted approval by the California Highway Patrol to equip their vehicles with this audible warning on a two-year pilot program.

In the year following the 2017 wildfires, Napa County successfully evacuated its citizens on three separate occasions under the pilot program, receiving positive feedback from the community. The neighboring county of Sonoma faced a similar crisis when the Kincaid Fire broke out in 2018. Notwithstanding the fact that the Sonoma Sheriff did not have CHP approval, the Sheriff equipped patrol vehicles with the Hi-Lo sirens and successfully evacuated over 185,000 residents with little or no incident.

Given the success of alerting the public impending catastrophic wildfires by using Hi-Lo sirens, it is appropriate that local law enforcement have the authority to use this tool for emergency alert.

Status

Introduced, referred to the Senate Committee on Transportation.

Support and Opposition

CSAC: watch

RCRC: no action

NACo: N/A

Local: Napa County Sheriff John Robertson (Sponsor)

STAFF COMMENTS

Platform: NO

Implications to Napa County and Departments

The County has supported the Sheriff's use of hi-lo sirens through multiple means, including promoting the pilot program at emergency preparedness meetings and other educational materials.

The Sheriff will be available to answer any questions the subcommittee may have.

Recommendation

Because this issue is not explicit in the platform, staff is recommending the subcommittee forward this bill to the Board of Supervisors with a recommended support position.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

A . SB 909

Recommendation: Approve

Reviewed By: Molly Rattigan