

**FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION**  
  
**HUMBOLDT COUNTY**

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533 C Street, Eureka, CA 95501

September 29, 2016

The Honorable Judge Joyce D. Hinrichs, Presiding Judge  
Superior Court of Humboldt County  
835 Fifth Street  
Eureka, CA 95501

RE: Humboldt County Fire Chiefs Association Invited Response to Humboldt County Grand Jury Report "Earthquake, Flood, Tsunami: Is Humboldt County Ready?"

Dear Members of the Humboldt County Grand Jury,

Thank you for the invitation to respond to the 2015-16 Humboldt County Grand Jury report titled "Earthquake, Flood, Tsunami: Is Humboldt County Ready?" I have reviewed the report with interest. A number of issues were investigated related to emergency preparedness, the County Emergency Operations Center, and emergency dispatching throughout the County.

In review of the report, I agreed with the majority of Findings presented by the Grand Jury as valid. I did not agree with Finding F5: The security of the basement Emergency Operations Center in the event of a tsunami is questionable due to its location partially below 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Eureka. The location of the Emergency Operations Center for the County of Humboldt is indeed housed in the basement of the County Courthouse, with that facility located under the north side courthouse parking lot and sidewalk, adjacent to Fourth Street. The location of the courthouse is well outside the tsunami inundation zone as shown on the Eureka Tsunami Evacuation Map as included with this response. The map shows the potential inundation area up to First Street in this part of Eureka, as the Courthouse is located upon some of the highest ground in the downtown Eureka area. The topographical elevation of the intersection of Fourth and I Street is set at approximately 42 feet above sea level, and two full city blocks outside of the inundation hazard zone depicted on the map.

Recommendation R1 where the Grand Jury recommended that the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services relocate the Emergency Operations Center into a larger, more functional facility does make sense, and is supported by the Humboldt County Fire Chiefs Association. The current facility is small, especially when the EOC is activated and multiple people are trying to fulfill their emergency management roles. The hindering factor in relocation of the Emergency Operations Center is directly related to the financial impact, and the suitability of either building a new facility, or developing an existing location into a functional Emergency Operations Center.

In review of the portion of the report pertaining to emergency dispatching within the county, much of the information is accurate and well presented. The dispatch centers listed handle the emergency and non-emergency incident dispatching for agencies within Humboldt County. The report spoke briefly of the areas that various dispatch centers provided service for. The report mentioned fire department dispatching, but my take away was that the report primarily focused upon law enforcement agency dispatching. Additionally, the report spoke to rural communities within Humboldt County relying on the County Sheriff's dispatch center in Eureka for emergency response.

There are 40 fire departments within Humboldt County, ranging from small volunteer fire companies, to volunteer fire districts, to career fire departments. As clarification for fire department dispatching within Humboldt County, there are currently three dispatch centers that provide consistent fire department dispatching: CALFIRE, Eureka Police and Fire Dispatch, and Fortuna Police Department. Two additional dispatch centers, Humboldt County Sheriff's Department and CHP, deal with incoming 911 calls that are then transferred to one of the three dispatch centers providing fire dispatch. In Humboldt County, CALFIRE dispatches all fire departments with the exception of Humboldt Bay Fire, who is dispatched by Eureka Police and Fire, and Fortuna Volunteer Fire Department, who is dispatched by the Fortuna Police Department.

Fire department dispatching is a unique skill set that is similar, yet differs in some areas from law enforcement dispatching. The dispatcher must learn a different set of terminology, the "jargon" of the fire service if you will. This varies greatly from "ten code" or penal code information. Areas that are similar between fire and law enforcement require the dispatcher to learn and understand what is being reported and said on scene, must be able to track resources in the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) record system, and be able to provide call and other pertinent or requested information for the units in the field. They must also be able to follow multiple incidents occurring at the same time. In the case of Eureka Police and Fire and Fortuna PD, the dispatchers will cover both fire and law enforcement within the course of their shift on duty, sometimes at the same time. Both fire and law enforcement dispatching are challenging individually, and it becomes even more challenging when the dispatch center dispatches both disciplines.

Consolidated dispatching has been explored a number of times within Humboldt County. Various departments have discussed or pursued the concept throughout the years. Many of these discussions focused upon consolidating law enforcement dispatching facilities and functions, and fire was often not considered in the conversation. In the most recent consolidated dispatch discussion between Eureka Police and Fire and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department, Humboldt Bay Fire was brought into the discussion. In the majority of discussions, the prohibiting factor has often been the lack of funding to make such an endeavor a reality.

The Grand Jury Report details locations where consolidated dispatch centers are located. One example, SHASCOM located in Shasta County, was cited as a consolidated dispatch center. SHASCOM currently dispatches for the Redding Police and Fire Departments, Anderson Police Department, the Shasta County Sheriff's Department, and ambulance services. While these agencies share this dispatch center, this center does not represent a fully consolidated, single dispatch center for Shasta County. CALFIRE dispatches the majority of fire resources within Shasta County. Placer County was also noted to have a consolidated dispatch center, and this is

correct for the agencies that it dispatches for. As with SHASCOM, Placer County also has fire departments that are dispatched by a CALFIRE dispatch center, so is not 100% consolidated within the county or location.

The consolidation of multiple dispatching facilities into one location would require a new facility; current facilities for any of the current Humboldt County dispatch centers are not large enough to contain a full facility to cover all of the county dispatch demands for law enforcement, fire, and EMS. This would take far more funding than is currently available. With the tough budgetary constraints being faced by our local agencies, there is not the funding available to commission a third party study of a consolidated dispatch within Humboldt County at this time.

The concept of a consolidated dispatch center covering all agencies can work. If such an endeavor is to be pursued and completed, it must serve all stakeholders adequately to insure that their needs are met, and must serve the community effectively and efficiently. So often the consolidated dispatch concept and discussion is focused upon law enforcement, but it must include the fire service and EMS and their concerns as well.

Currently, no agency has the funding to support a third-party study of consolidated dispatching for Humboldt County, nor do the agencies involved had the economic means to construct a new consolidated dispatch center. For this reason I do not feel that Recommendation R3 for the formal feasibility study of the formation of a Joint Powers Authority to consolidate the Emergency Response Dispatch Centers for Humboldt County using research consultants who are not part of any county stakeholder agency is practical or a reality in the foreseeable future.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Gillespie  
Vice President  
Humboldt County Fire Chiefs Association

# EUREKA

## Tsunami Evacuation Map

**Tsunami Safe Area**  
**Zone**  
 In case of earthquake go to safe area



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