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SAN DIEGO
COUNTY GRAND JURY



August 28, 2006

The Honorable Janis Sammartino
Presiding Judge
P.O. Box 122724
San Diego, CA 92112

Dear Judge Sammartino:

Subject: Response to the Grand Jury Report "Lack of San Diego County Evacuation Preparations"

This letter is on behalf of the City of Solana Beach in response to the San Diego County Grand Jury Report 2005/06 filed on May 31, 2006.

The Grand Jury's report states that appropriate systems are not in place to conduct emergency evacuations in the event of a tsunami in the greater San Diego area. The report states that the public is in danger from these disasters, due in part, to a lack of understanding and complacency on the part of the public regarding the forces that might precipitate them. The report states that the public is not being educated as to how they should proceed if a tsunami or other disaster occurs. The Grand Jury has made recommendations in anticipation that they will achieve greater public readiness in case of such disasters.

This letter will address each finding and recommendation that is pertinent to the City of Solana Beach. Additionally, as you may be aware, the City of Solana Beach receives law enforcement services via contract with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department and they have responded to the Grand Jury Report separately.

Lack of San Diego County Preparations

Grand Jury Finding:

Tsunamis pose a significant threat to life and property.

City of Solana Beach Response:

The City of Solana Beach agrees with this finding.

Grand Jury Finding:

Inundation maps showing possible San Diego County shoreline which might be submerged by tsunami waters is not adequate.

City of Solana Beach Response:

The City of Solana Beach disagrees with this finding. The City of Solana Beach relies on OES in providing the best possible tsunami evacuation planning maps (via the University of Southern California (USC) Tsunami Research Group) for emergency preparedness. The USC methodology for the mapping process meets the standard for both the State of California and the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Grand Jury Finding:

The San Diego Police Department needs to be on the same systems as the rest of the county for emergency communications.

City of Solana Beach Response:

The City of Solana Beach agrees with this finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

06-67: The City of Solana Beach install emergency signage along the San Diego coastal corridor, directing citizens and visitors to safety in case of a tsunami emergency

City of Solana Beach Response

The City of Solana Beach is in partial agreement with this finding. First of all, we are open to the suggestion that signage be installed at primary beach access points in areas most at risk of the threat of a tsunami. The purpose of this signage would be to increase awareness for beachgoers of the potential need to evacuate the area quickly.

The City of Solana Beach does not agree with the recommendation that signage is required “on all main thoroughfares” to communicate “avenues of escape and shelter from a tsunami.” In our view, the most effective method of tsunami evacuation in Solana Beach will be an evacuation of low lying areas “by foot” to higher ground. Roadway signs are not necessary in Solana Beach’s particular situation in which only the beaches themselves are at risk of coastal flooding and beachgoers can reach safety by walking to higher ground.

06-68 The City of Solana Beach find funding sources for the installation of warning sirens for an imminent devastating tsunami.

City of Solana Beach Response

The City of Solana Beach agrees with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department and OES that this recommendation is not warranted. Although warning sirens appear to be an immediate system of warning, sirens do not direct citizens where to go and what to do specifically. The City of Solana Beach believes that a combination of warning systems are better ways of warning citizens and providing information and specific and exact directions to the public.

It is important to note that the City of Solana Beach has year round lifeguard staffing with numerous individuals on call 24 hours a day. Solana Beach's permanent lifeguard tower is equipped with public address (P.A.) systems, which are an effective way of communicating specific information to beach patrons. Additionally, all emergency vehicles are equipped with P.A. systems and can quickly provide evacuation instructions to area residents.

Additionally, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department currently utilizes a community emergency notification system and has future system upgrades in progress. For example, Reverse 911 is capable of making emergency community notifications, specifically weather related evacuations as noted in the Grand Jury Report. The implementation of this system alone allows law enforcement to notify the community with rapid and specific instructions should evacuations be required. Notifications can be made in conjunction with other emergency broadcast systems such as the Emergency Alert Systems (EAS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radios.

Should you desire additional information from the City of Solana Beach, please do not hesitate to contact us at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Dismas Abelman
Deputy Fire Chief