

# The CAO Weekly Report

The week of September 14, 2015



## *Monterey County Administrative Office*

Lew C. Bauman, CAO

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- September is Preparedness Month - are you?
- Preparing for Open Enrollment



## County OES Aids Lake County During Rocky Fire

Massive wildfires are still greatly affecting areas throughout California. Did you ever wonder how county staff cope during a disaster of this scale? They get assistance from counties throughout the state through a mutual aid system, which sends staff from other areas to help out and relieve exhausted local workers.

County Office of Emergency Services Director Sherrie Collins recently spent time in Lake County, assisting there during the Rocky Fire. She talked about her experience and how Monterey County stacks up to other communities in being ready for a disaster.

### **Q. When and how did you get the call for help for Lake County?**

A. I was dispatched through the State of California's EMMA system (Emergency Management Mutual Aid) system on Friday, July 30<sup>th</sup> and stayed for four days. CalOES (the Governor's Office of Emergency Services) reached out to 22 counties requesting assistance in working in Lake County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The EMMA system brought seven emergency service managers to Lake County from Marin, Sonoma, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Monterey County. CalOES itself sent an additional seven emergency services professionals.

These experienced managers were needed to mentor and help the County's Operational Area EOC. Lake County has a small staff with little experience and training for a fire of this magnitude. The EOC was a small conference room tucked into the County Courthouse with only five computers and some office supplies. This type of set up is called a 'cold EOC,'



A view of the Rocky Fire.

meaning staff must create the EOC out of boxes, occupy a facility that is not normally used for emergency operations and create the connectivity to communicate via computer and internet. The small conference room was clearly insufficient, so the County quickly contracted with a local tribal casino to use its

ballroom! County IT and CalOES provided internet service and satellite phones to communicate. Laptop computers were borrowed from the county Social Services Department. It took a couple of days to get everything running smoothly.

**Q. What was the status of the fire when you arrived?**

A. The Rocky Fire ultimately burned a total of 69,000 acres, 43 homes and 53 outbuildings. When I arrived, the fire had burned 15,000 acres. When I left four days later, it had grown to 70,000 acres and burned 24 homes, 28 outbuildings. Mandatory evacuations were in place affecting 700 residents.

**Q. What was your role in the operation?**

A. I was working in Logistics as the Section Chief and working with the Parks Director who was their normal Logistics Chief. We worked together on Saturday and then I gave him a break for Sunday and Monday. We worked 12-14 hour shifts.



**Q. Are you still in contact with those you worked with?**

A. Yes, I am still talking with the Emergency Manager there to

An animal evacuation center opened during the fire and housed two horses, 12 goats, 20 cats, three dogs, five parrots and five ducks.

share lessons learned from the Big Sur Pfeiffer Fire in respect to recovery as well as recovering dollars. We spent quite a bit of time talking about cost reimbursement and recovery planning while I was there. This disaster drained county resources, so it's critical that staff learn how to access recovery funds.

**Q. After working this disaster, how would you compare Monterey County's EOC and our preparedness for a disaster, particularly now that the County is focusing on winter storm preparedness?**

A. Monterey County can be proud of our capabilities and our capacity to handle emergencies and disasters. We have a "hot" EOC that is ready to activate at a moment's notice with a robust array of technology and support systems. We have a trained team to respond including core OES staff. Having said that, keeping our skills sharp cannot be underestimated. That is why OES routinely creates and encourages participation in trainings and exercises which build competencies. When you have to hit the ground running, training develops that intuitive mental memory of what needs to be done.



## September is Preparedness Month - Help Get the Word Out!



Considering the wildfire disasters happening around the state and concerns for heavy rains this coming winter, timing couldn't be better to mark National Preparedness Month, which is observed each September. OES will be organizing and participating in trainings, but a key part of preparedness is getting the word out to both staff and the public - can you help?

Would you like materials about preparedness and how to sign up for the Alert! Monterey County phone notification system for your staff? Do you have a counter or public area that these materials could be available to the public? If you would like a brochure stand and materials at your office, please contact OES at x1905. Many thanks to the Libraries which are already helping promote sign-ups for the Alert! notifications both in branches and online.

Here are some of the preparedness activities OES is working on this month:

- A large functional exercise held September 11<sup>th</sup> in the EOC.
- Several Table Top Exercises with regional agencies.
- A resolution for the Board of Supervisors on September 22<sup>nd</sup> recognizing National Preparedness Month and declaring September 21-25 as Winter Storm Preparedness Week.

- A winter storm workshop for responders on September 24<sup>th</sup>.
- An Emergency Preparedness Fair in Monterey at Del Monte Shopping Center on September 26<sup>th</sup>.
- The County will test the Alert!MontereyCounty notification system on September 30<sup>th</sup>. OES will be urging residents to get their cell phones registered in the system. Last year's test was a big success, resulting in hundreds of new phones registered.

The Health Department is also encouraging us to talk about preparedness with our families and loved ones, particularly about a communications plan. How would you get in contact with each other in the event of an emergency? How will you check in if you are at work and the kids are at school?

You'll find some good ideas in this [Preparedness Minute – Preparing your family](#). This publication is also available in [Spanish](#).



## Social Services Benefits Information Fair Prepares Employees for Open Enrollment

The County's annual Open Enrollment is now underway, and thanks to an employee information fair, Department of Social Services staff are well prepared for making important choices.



Employees listen and ask questions of benefit providers.

Prior to the Open Enrollment kick-off, the Department of Social Services hosted a three-hour Employee Benefits Information Fair on Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup> at the Life Foundation building.

Representatives of the County's benefits providers were on hand to answer employees' questions, distribute valuable information and share giveaways.

Paulette Clark, Melissa Zamora, and Sunny Haight from Central Human

Resources Benefits assisted employees and provided support to the vendors. Also on hand, Assistant CAO Manny Gonzalez and DSS Human Resources Manager Cheryl Pirozzoli.

A total of 140 employees attended the event, and many won prizes donated by various vendors. Empowerment Retirement Services, VSP, UNUM, Pacific Health Alliance, Health Promotion Partnership and the United Way Employee Giving Campaign. Anthem Blue Cross, CalPERS Retirement, allU.S. Credit Union and the Charles Nechtem Group (EAP) participated.

Open Enrollment runs September 14<sup>th</sup> to October 9<sup>th</sup>. Everyone is encouraged to go into the ESS system and check their benefits. Don't be caught off guard and miss the deadline for making any changes. If you do not wish to make changes, you may not need to do anything at all. For information or if you have questions, please check with your [department benefit coordinator](#).



At the fair, information was available about both health and financial services.

