



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT NO. 2007

“Wildfire Preparedness in Contra Costa County”

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT RESPONSE

FINDINGS – *California Penal Code Section 933.05(a) requires a response to the designated findings of the Grand Jury.*

F1. During a Red Flag Warning, fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County often deploy pre-positioned firefighting strike teams to maximize the ability to respond to wildfires.

Response: **Agree.**

F2. Fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County require property owners to perform weed abatement on their property to reduce the risk of fire spread.

Response: **Agree.**

F3. Not all fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County use predetermined polygons and routing algorithms in their evacuation plans.

Response: **Agree.**

F4. Fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County recommend that residents comply with law enforcement’s orders to evacuate during an emergency.

Response: **Agree.**

F5. Not all fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County use new technologies, such as ground sensors, drones, satellites, and fire spotting cameras, for early detection of fires.

Response: **Agree.** It should be noted, however, that the majority of the “new technologies” referenced are in various forms of research or early stages of testing and are not readily available for fire departments to be deployed.

F6. The October 2019 Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events disrupted emergency response efforts and communications in Contra Costa County.

Response: **Agree.**

F7. Fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County are not always informed by PG&E when the utility is performing non-emergency maintenance work that presents a high fire risk during a Red Flag Warning.

Response: **Agree.**

F8. An ordinance passed by the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, requiring PG&E to give advance notice of non-emergency maintenance work that presents a high fire risk, enables the fire district to pre-position a team at the utility worksite and recover labor and equipment costs.

Response: **Agree, as we understand the San Ramon Valley FPD ordinance to be written.**

RECOMMENDATIONS – *California Penal Code Section 933.05(b) requires a response to the designated recommendations of the Grand Jury.*

R1. The Board of Directors of Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, East Contra Costa Fire Protection District, Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District, and San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District should consider directing their Fire Chief to update wildfire

evacuation plans and incorporate pre-determined polygons and advanced routing technology, by June 30, 2021.

Response: The recommendation has not been implemented, but will be implemented in 2021. Collectively, the Contra Costa County Fire Chiefs Association supported a grant application in 2019 to provide funding for the procurement and implementation of a software program that will provide a uniform evacuation planning platform. The \$300,000 grant was approved in late 2019 with funding to be available in late 2020. Procurement is expected to commence in late 2020 with implementation scheduled in mid-2021. The software will satisfy the recommendation included in this report.

R2. The Board of Directors of Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, East Contra Costa Fire Protection District, Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District, Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District, and San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District should consider identifying funds to adopt or expand the use of new technologies, such as ground sensors, drones, satellites, and fire spotting cameras, to help detect fires in high-risk areas, by June 30, 2021

Response: This recommendation has been implemented (partially), requires more analysis in some cases, or is not feasible in some cases. Since 2019 the fire agencies within Contra Costa County have been working individually, and collectively, on researching or implementing many of the technologies referenced.

The Contra Costa Regional Fire Communications Center (CCR FCC), operated by the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, has access to real-time satellite detection of fires as provided by PG&E. The CCR FCC can use this information to dispatch fire resources to a given area, often in remote locations, and use this information to support or confirm a fire location within a certain geographic range. This technology can be considered as early detection.

Within the past 12 months, the camera network has expanded from three to twelve locations. Each of these cameras can be controlled by the CCR FCC, the Fire/Rescue Mutual Aid Coordinator, or various chief officers to focus on locations where a fire is reported. The cameras provide a valuable tool in confirming a fire location upon dispatch, determining the severity of the fire, and assisting in accelerating the process of getting additional resources dispatched to a known fire. This technology is not equipped for automatic detection purposes and is used for confirmation and situational awareness upon receiving notification of a fire.

Drones are in use or being placed in use by several fire agencies, however the use for early detection of fires is questionable at this time, based on available technology. Additionally, the use of drones on or near active wildland fire incidents interferes with aerial firefighting efforts.

Ground sensors have not been proven to be feasible at this time.

R4. The Board of Directors of Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, East Contra Costa Fire Protection District, Moraga-Orinda Fire Protection District, and Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District should review and consider mechanisms, such as the ordinance passed by the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, that would enable their fire district to recover labor and equipment costs from PG&E for overseeing electrical utility work that presents a high fire risk, by June 30, 2021.

Response: ***This recommendation requires further analysis.*** *It is unclear whether PG&E can be regulated by a local agency in a manner similar to the ordinance passed by the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District. PG&E has filed a lawsuit against the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District challenging the validity of the ordinance. Upon resolution of this legal challenge, there will be more information available in providing a better understanding and potential direction for similar local regulation of PG&E activities. Until these matters are resolved, implementation of this recommendation is not feasible. A timeline for resolution or potential implementation is not possible until the legal process is resolved.*