



Nevada County OES
Inland Region

After Action Report

Wind Complex – Lobo and McCourtney Wild Fires DR-4344

Incident Period: October 8, 2017 thru October 31, 2017

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Executive Summary

On October 8, 2018 at approximately 10:30 pm several fires were reported burning within Nevada County. The McCourtney Fire burned 76 acres and destroyed 10 homes and many outbuildings. The Lobo Fire burned 820 acres and destroyed 20 homes to include many outbuildings. The fires started during Red Flag conditions with extreme winds fanning the fires and created a fast moving firestorm. In response to the Lobo Fire, large areas were evacuated during the night to ensure public safety. Lake Wildwood was the most populated area that was evacuated which stressed road systems to maximum capacity. Traffic was backed up for many miles which increased frustration of evacuees and challenges to First Responders.

Two human shelters and one animal shelter were activated to support evacuated population. Of the two shelters one was staffed by County personnel and the other shelter was staffed by the American Red Cross. The Nevada County Veterinary Disaster Response Team opened a shelter at the fairgrounds which housed hundreds of animals during the course of the incident.

Following the fires several “hot washes”, an After Action Review (AAR) Workshop and completed questioners from County staff were reviewed providing valuable information concerning Nevada County’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) actions during the fires. An AAR is a tool to identify deficiencies, shortcomings and challenges during the response phase of the incident. Through the AAR process a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) is developed which identifies issues, contact agency and timeframe to correct identified issues. However, some issues identified may not be correctable at local level and will require state or federal action to correct.

Principle findings include:

1. The need for Evacuation Traffic Control Plans.
2. Better Alert and Notification messaging formatting.
3. Low number of citizens signed up for CodeRed Mass Notification system.
4. Local Operational Coordination with FEMA concerning temporary housing.

There were many lessons learned during the wildfires. However, we were able to apply them to last year’s extreme rains and the Oroville Dam Evacuation Shelter for an improved response and outcome. This was evident during Sheltering Operations which displayed excellent coordination and staff coverage at the shelter sites.

The 2017 California Fire Season was one of the worst fire seasons in California’s history and should be a wakeup call for everyone that lives in a High Fire danger areas. In recent years, wildfire fires are burning at higher intensities producing greater devastation with increased property losses and greater impacts to infrastructure. A “Whole Community” approach is the best method to overcome our fire hazard issue within Nevada County.

Emergency Operations Center Activation

Approximately, 00:45 hours on October 8, 2017 the Office of Emergency Services (OES) Program Manager (PM) received a phone call from the Nevada County Sheriff's Office concerning multiple fires burning within the county. OES PM immediately notified Director of Emergency Services and Medical Health Operational Area Coordinator (MHOAC). Staff began arriving at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) about 01:15 hours. EOC Initial Objectives were to gather information on the extent of the fires, open people and animal evacuation shelters while providing timely information to the public. Information from the field was challenging due to scope of fires and fast movement. Additionally, Public Information Officer (PIO) resources in the field were limited. However, coordination and communications between fire agencies and EOC ensured critical information was being provided from the field. The Sheriff's Office provided staff to the EOC to coordinate evacuations and assist with situational awareness. The GIS Unit was activated to provide "real time" maps of the evacuations for posting on the Nevada County website. We received many positive comments on the GIS Evacuation map, as it was easy to read and understand.

Cal OES Emergency Services Coordinator (ESC) arrived at the EOC approximately, 03:00 hours which assisted the EOC with gathering intelligence and providing situational awareness concerning the fire in the Operational Area and throughout the state. The Cal OES ESC coordinated requesting resources to support shelter operations and do some extended operations advance planning. Our only resource request for the state was a shower unit, which was delivered the following day.

By 08:00, October 9, 2017, all EOC Sections were activated except the Plans and Intelligence Section. Planning Section was not activated due to staffing shortages. Efforts are focused on building the Plans and Intelligence Section before the next disaster.

On or about October 9, 2017, 01:30 hours Red Cross and First Baptist Church were notified and request was made for an evacuation shelter. Approximately, at 05:30 the county opened a "County Run" shelter at Twin Cities Church to support evacuees from additional expanded evacuation areas. Sheltering activities were supervised and coordinated through the Nevada County Social Services Department (EF 6) and the Nevada County Public Health Department (EF 8). Access and Functional Needs (AFN) were monitored and supported with assistance of FREED which ensured AFN needs were being met.

Feeding of shelter populations was supported by the Salvation Army and county resources. Many local business provided meals for free or drastically reduced prices. Shelters remained open until October 13, 2017 with most populations departing on the afternoon of October 12, 2017.

Nevada County Community Development Agency, Health and Human Services Agency, along with Red Cross, Salvation Army, FEMA and State Agencies activated a Local Assistance Center (LAC) a week after the fires to support immediate needs of the fire survivors. Over 40 residents used the services of the LAC over a two day period. Salvation Army and Red Cross provided vouchers for food and other personal items. LAC operations went very well and assisting agencies were able to provide much needed support to the fire survivors.

The McCourtney Fire burned 76 acres and the Lobo Fire burned 821 acres with a total of thirty homes destroyed.

EOC Layout

During larger emergency incidents, the main room of the EOC should be used to support the staffing levels required to effectively respond. An EOC layout plan should be developed for larger incidents which require additional space and staff in the EOC. For a Type III (small) incident the small room in the EOC is functional. However, for a Type I (large) incident the entire room should be used. A checklist or job aid should be developed for a Type I EOC incident to ensure EOC staff completes required tasks. For example, the phone lines on the main wall are not active and need to be activated prior to use.

Shelters Both County Managed & Red Cross

Two people shelters were activated to care, feed and house fire evacuees. Few issues were observed at the shelters which I believe was due to the large sheltering operations that Nevada County supported in February 2017 during the Lake Oroville Evacuation. One concern is that Nevada County Public Health Department can only run 24/7 operations for about 72 hours without requiring additional support, this is due to staffing levels and the requirement to support normal everyday operations. The use of contracted or volunteer services should be explored to support county staff. Contracted services may be challenging due to the demand for available trained health care workers. The use of student nurse volunteers should be considered. There are several nursing schools in the area which could provide volunteers during an emergency. For example, the Public Health Department has used student nurse volunteers during their Mass Immunization Drills.

Continued coordination and collaboration with the Red Cross has improved shelter activation time and delivery of initial shelter support package. After hours and weekend activations can take longer than other activations due to staff availability and longer times to identify staff for the shelters. The county was able to secure and move Red Cross trailer to a shelter, so it was available once Red Cross volunteers arrived. County, Red Cross staff and evacuees helped set up shelter. Shelter population varied from 70 to over 200 depending on incident timeline.

The response from the local community and businesses proved to be very helpful throughout the Wind Complex response and recovery efforts. Local churches created a coalition to coordinate actions which provided many resources for those with "Unmet" needs. These efforts will continue for many months if not years. One of the biggest unmet need is removing dead trees from properties impacted by the fires.

Animal Shelter

The Nevada County Veterinary Disaster Response Team was activated to provide animal care and sheltering services for the fire evacuees. Shelter population consisted of dogs, cats, birds, turtle, llamas and donkeys. At one time, over 200 horses were housed at the shelter.

Sheltering animals requires a large trained workforce to properly care for them. The Nevada County Veterinary Disaster Response Team (NCVDRT) has many registered and trained volunteers to support animal sheltering operations. However, during a large disaster or long term incident spontaneous volunteers are needed to safely house and care for animals. Over 83 spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers (SUVs) were used by NCVDRT during the 2017 Wind Complex Fires.

The State of California, managed through Cal OES, offers a Disaster Service Worker Volunteer Program (DSWVP) to provide worker's compensation benefits in the event a Disaster Service Worker (DSW) is injured while performing authorized disaster service duties. The DSWVP requires many steps to be completed to be eligible for the worker compensation benefits. Key responsibilities with the DSWVP is to ensure all volunteers are registered, supervised, trained and have been formally activated by the local government.

The DSWVP requires documentation of each area of responsibility under the program. For example, under the DSWVP volunteers should be trained. All trainings must be pre-approved, in advance and in writing, prior to taking place. Trainings should be approved by a governmental agency that has expertise and knowledge of care and sheltering of animals. Under the Cal OES guidelines Disaster Councils (Emergency Services Council) are empowered to register and direct the activities of the disaster service workers within the county.

The NCVDRT should be "sponsored" by county agency or department with knowledge on small and large animal issues. Having a sponsor will ensure policies and procedures of the DSWVP are followed and maintained to ensure eligibility under the program. Additionally, this provides a mechanism to affirm that the county will have trained and safe animal shelter volunteers available for disasters.

Public Information

The Public Information Officer (PIO) section provide information to the citizens of the county through Press Releases, interviews, Social Media and on site briefing's at the shelters. There was a little delay in contacting some media outlets due to outdated after hour contact information for media outlets. Social media played a large role in the Wind Complex which allowed the PIO's to release timely information. One area for improvement is to provide daily or twice daily briefings to the evacuees in shelters. County and Cal Fire PIO's started providing briefings on the third day of shelter activation to evacuees. PIO's would like to do briefings starting on day one or two. Installing Information Kiosk, "A" frame message board, at shelter locations would enhance communications with evacuees.

There are several messaging formats available within the county but there was some confusion to what format we should be using. A standard template for Emergency News releases should be created to ensure consistency with message formatting, message content and sender information.

During the first week of the Wind Complex, four county staff identified to be PIO's were attending the week long PIO course at the California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI) in San Louis Obispo.

Evacuations

The Sheriff's Office coordinated evacuations in the EOC with the support of Law Enforcement Mutual Aid. County GIS developed evacuation maps as the incident escalated and posted maps on county website and on social media sites. Received positive comments on evacuation map as a great visual aid for citizens. The importance of having evacuation maps on the website and available for community cannot be understated. When updating EOC layout plan consideration of additional working space for GIS and Sheriff Staff Evacuation Language should be evaluated.

All evacuation planning should consider control of traffic signals which may need to be adjusted remotely or manually. The Sheriff's Office, County Public Works, Cal Trans and CHP should be included in any planning efforts. The traffic signal at Highway 20 and Pleasant Valley Road should be controlled manually to increase flow of evacuation traffic from Lake Wildwood. Traffic cones should be deployed on Pleasant Valley Drive to identify the right and center lane is for evacuation (egress) and one lane is open in opposite direction providing ingress for First Responders. Lake Wildwood evacuations should consider having North Gate evacuees using Mooney Flat Road as the primary route which would help relieve traffic congestion on Pleasant Valley Road.

Traffic signal control for other high density populations such as Lake of the Pines and Lake Wildwood should also be considered.

The County has many resources to notify citizens of an emergency situation, however, there is still the possibility that citizens will not receive message. Door to door notification is one way to ensure that citizens have received evacuation notification. The challenge with door to door notifications is they are very labor intensive and require much more staff to complete. During the initial phase of a fast moving wildfire incident it may be impossible to perform door to door notifications due to inadequate staffing. Once Mutual Aid from other jurisdictions arrived, door to door notifications could be completed.

Once a residence has been evacuated there should be some type of identifying mark to inform evacuation personnel that the residence has been safely evacuated. One method used in other jurisdictions is to put flagging tape on mailboxes or across driveway identifying evacuation has occurred at the location. This would require citizens to have some type of flagging tape available for them place on mailbox or driveway. Additionally, First Responders should have flagging tape available in their vehicles.

Message Boards would be a great resource to have available for evacuations. Roadside message boards can provide quick and updated information concerning evacuation routes to evacuees. There are message boards available for rent which we can secure from a Sacramento location. However, during summer months message boards are scarce due to increased construction activities. The message boards could also be used to display preparedness information such as informing public of Red Flag Days, No Fireworks, High Fire Danger, Clear Snow from Propane Tanks, and other road hazards.

The County Evacuation Language is being updated with the following terminology and will be implemented in time for the 2018 Fire Season. The evacuation language is from the FIREScope Field Operations Guide (FOG) Manual which is used extensively by Fire Departments throughout the state and nation. A public outreach program should be implemented prior to next Fire Season to educate the public and media of the new evacuation language. New evacuation language:

Immediate Evacuation Order:

Requires the immediate movement of people out of an affected area due to an imminent threat to life. Choosing to stay could result in loss of life. Staying may also impede the work of emergency personnel. Due to the changing nature of the emergency, this Immediate Evacuation Order may be the only warning that people in the affected area(s) receive.

Evacuation Warning:

Alerts people in an affected area (s) of potential threat to life and property. People who need additional time should consider evacuating at this time. An Evacuation Warning considers the probability that an area will be affected and prepares people for a potential Immediate Evacuation Order.

Shelter-In-Place:

Advises people to stay secure at their current location by remaining in place as evacuation will cause a higher potential for loss of life.

Evacuation Maps

County evacuation maps need to be reviewed and updated to provide a more organized evacuation of impacted areas. Areas with high population densities and limited egress and ingress should be priority areas. This is especially true with gated communities and densely populated areas such as the Alta Sierra Community. Consideration to developing a “zone” evacuation type maps should be evaluated. Collaboration with community members will assist in ensuring all input on map development. OES, Public Works, Fire and Law Enforcement should create a team to update maps. Having “pre-identified” evacuation zones will inform citizens on their evacuation zone and allows zones to be created in the CodeRed System prior to ordered evacuations.

Alert and Notifications - CodeRed

Many CodeRed, Emergency Mass Notification System, messages were sent to warn citizens of the fast moving wildfire in their area. As with any tool, CodeRed does have limitations which users need to be aware of during use. For land phone lines the power must be on for land line to work. Additionally, a cell tower was lost during the fire and many who were signed up for cell notifications did not get calls. Every attempt is made to get CodeRed Alerts out as fast as possible to get alerts out prior to power going out. CodeRed alert messages should be a little more descriptive in areas being evacuated and with guidance. This is important when multiple incidents are occurring to keep confusion down to a minimum. We had several reports of folks who had registered their phone and moved out of the area who received alerts. Public outreach in setting cell phone settings could be helpful. For example, some phones you can program incoming phone number and if phone is turned off, it will turn on, and let that call go through.

The CodeRed system used to be limited to 10 users which made it challenging in identify limited authorized users. As of January 2018, CodeRed user level has been increased to an unlimited number. OES and the Sheriff’s Office monitors who has access to CodeRed and reviews the list to ensure only authorized user have access. The increased numbers for access to the CodeRed will be helpful but could cause other problems. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) should be develop to assist users on use of CodeRed and specific alerting guidelines or formatting.

During each disaster and shortly thereafter, the OES business phone line receives a “spike” in calls requesting assistance to sign up for CodeRed. The OES business phone needs to be forwarded to pre-identified staff to support these requests in a timely manner. In a six hour period, during the Wind Complex, there were over 50 messages left on the OES business line. Most of the calls were for CodeRed support and evacuation questions.

Community CodeRed Test Alerts should be completed prior to next Fire Season to increase public awareness and confidence. This would require extensive public outreach to educate citizens of emergency mass notifications capabilities and functions. Additionally, the County CodeRed System will be upgraded on April 1, 2018 which will allow alerts to be sent to all cell phones in targeted area.

Recovery – Temporary Housing

Once a Presidential disaster was declared Cal OES and FEMA had a Division Supervisor assigned in the EOC to assist in Recovery Operations. The placement of Federal and State Division Supervisors in the local EOC was helpful and appreciated. In the future, to enhance communications with the EOC, Cal OES and FEMA, trainings and exercises need to incorporate a FEMA/Federal component. We were unprepared for the amount of “federal requirements” that must be completed to support local recovery Operations at the federal level. Additionally, we were surprised that when FEMA support arrived that most were unable or unauthorized to release information without approval from higher up. One of the basic tenants of the Incident Command System (ICS) is: If you send an agency representative to an EOC, they should be able to make decisions and provide information without having to constantly ask a higher level of authority.

Maintaining situational awareness on current housing needs and other needs of fire victims was impossible due to Personally Identifiable Information (PII) policy and procedures of FEMA. It became apparent that most Federal, State and Local Governments lack knowledge in PII Procedures which caused delays in receiving critical information and should be addressed immediately. Most PII requests contained outdated and inaccurate information which negatively impacted decisions and courses of action of the local government EOC. On a conference call with the Joint Field Office (JFO) and Cal OES we were informed that timely and accurate information concerning temporary housing could not be provided.

A possible alternative is for the County to establish a Recovery Housing Coordinator Position in the EOC and develop system to track and maintain current recovery housing information, family and individual needs and permanent housing solutions. This system should have capacity to handle 500 to 800 displaced families. This may be considered a duplication of efforts but local governments need accurate and timely information of post-disaster housing issues.

The FEMA Government Liaison Task Force communicated directly with Board of Supervisors when they had been instructed to go through the FEMA Division Supervisor first.

The FEMA Long Term Recovery Task Force visited the Nevada County EOC to inform the county of what we should be concerned with for Long Term Recovery. The Task Force mentioned the importance of creating a Long Term Recovery Team with By Laws and other supporting documentation. The EOC asked FEMA if they could provide template for By-Laws; their response was *“we are not authorized to provide that information.”*

Public Health Emergency

There was some confusion in declaring a local Public Health Emergency for Debris Removal. The state does not require a Public Health Emergency to be declared for wildfire debris removal. However, to be

eligible for federal recovery funding a Public Health Emergency must be declared. Current law requires Public Health Emergencies to be reaffirmed every two weeks. The requirement to update the declaration every two weeks became cumbersome and confusing. Explore having the Public Health Declaration on a 30 day cycle similar to Emergency Declarations.

Right of Entry Forms

Right of Entry (ROE) form development was left to FEMA and Cal OES and did not seek legal review from local government. We were told to “*take it or leave it.*” ROE Agreements should be developed prior to disaster so all stakeholders have a chance to provide input. Additionally, if ROE’s are created before the disaster it should speed up the debris removal process. Both Cal OES and FEMA stress the importance in having “pre-disaster” agreements in place to support timely response and recovery activities.

Legal Issues

There were many legal issues with this disaster that should have been identified prior to this incident through trainings or exercises. Several times during the incident the EOC had to halt operations until legal issues were addressed at state and federal levels. Nevada County is fortunate to have an engaged County Counsel which provided legal guidance during critical operations in the EOC. Cal OES should consider creating a legal review team/committee with representatives from all levels of government to discuss legal issues that may arise during a disaster before they occur.

Corrective Action Plan (CAP)

Capability	Observation Title	Recommendation	Responsible Agency	Agency POC	Start Date	Completion Date
Operational Coordination	During larger incidents the EOC should use entire room to better support emergency operations.	Develop EOC Set-Up & Layout Plan.	OES/IGS	OES, IGS	May 2018	July 2018
Operational Coordination	Community Evacuation Maps are in need of updating.	Update Community Evacuation Plans. Develop comprehensive evacuation plans for high density communities.	OES Partners: Fire/Law/Public Works/Community Members	OES	January 2018	January 2019 – One community. January 2020 – Two communities.
Public Information and Warning	CodeRed -Emergency Mass Notification System	Messaging format should be developed and policy for use.	NCSO Partners: PIO Group OES	EOC Communications Group	March 2018	July 2018
Public Information and Warning	More community members need to sign up for CodeRed.	At every opportunity thru public meetings or association meetings etc. county staff should assist citizens in signing up for CodeRed.	OES PIO Group	OES	February 2018	Continuing outreach.
Public Information and Warning	Evacuees at shelter wanted more information.	Consider setting up information kiosk at each shelter location and provide a daily (or more often if needed) briefing to shelter population.	PIO Group	PIO	May 2018	July 2018

Mass Care Services	Personal Assistance Service (PAS) for shelter clients.	Explore using IHSS workers, student nurses and contracting for PAS.	OES/HHSA (PH)	OES	February 2018	October 2018
Mass Care Services	Limited resource for Registered Nurses/ Public Health Nurses	This continues to be an issue. Explore the use of volunteer student nurses and hiring outside assistance.	Public Health/OES	Public Health, OES	May 2018	
Mass Care Services	No cell service at shelter site.	Look at alternate communication systems such as radio's or cell signal booster.	Public Health/OES	Public Health, OES	March 2018	June 2018
Logistics and Supply Chain Management	Availability of medical supplies and requesting resources.	Provide additional training on ordering medical supplies and process.	Public Health	Public Health	March 2018	June 2018
Operational Coordination	Increased amount of legal issue during Response and Recovery – ROE's, Debris Removal and Temporary Housing Personal Identifiable Information (PII).	Cal OES Legal and Operational Areas Legal Counsel should create working group to work on these issues prior to an incident.	County Counsel	County Counsel	March 2018	
Intelligence and Information Sharing	Federal policy on Personal Identifiable Information (PII) is too restrictive and most staff are not trained on handling PII.	PII training, at all levels, is needed. When doing exercises PII should be included in the scenario.	FEMA			
Environmental Response/Health and Safety	Confusion in declaring Public Health Emergency for Debris Removal.	Consider 30 disaster period as used for Emergency Declarations.	Public Health CDPH Cal OES	Public Health, OES		
Operational Coordination	Volunteers groups should be "sponsored"	The animal disaster group is getting larger and requires				

	by a county department.	additional oversight of training and operations.				
Operational Coordination	There is not enough depth to EOC staffing, especially the Plans & Intelligence Section.	Recruit additional staff members, conduct trainings and exercise.	OES	OES	February 2018	June 2018
Critical Transportation	During mass evacuation traffic lights should be operated manually to increase flow of egressing population.	Work with Caltrans and Public Works Departments to develop process to modify traffic signals. Include information in evacuation plans.	Public Works	County Public Works, NCSO	March 2018	July 2018
Operational Coordination at the Federal Level	Challenging in getting timely and accurate information at the Federal level.	Need training and more interaction during exercises with FEMA to enhance communications and understanding of FEMA processes during federally declared incidents.	Local OES, Cal OES and FEMA	OES, Cal OES	March 2018	