



County of Santa Cruz 0255

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

March 21, 2000

AGENDA: April 4, 2000

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

SUBJECT: HAZARDOUS MATERIALS EMERGENCY RESPONSE CAPABILITY

Dear Board Members:

The two fire agencies, Scotts Valley Fire Protection District and City of Watsonville Fire, currently providing Level Two Hazardous Materials Response capability have stated their intention to end this service due to the lack of financial support. As a result, the County has **reached** a point where re-evaluation of the level of Hazardous Materials Emergency Response capability being provided within our jurisdiction is needed. The outcome of this re-evaluation will: 1) determine the appropriate level of service; 2) determine how that level of service will be rendered; 3) require the allocation and/or re-allocation of resources; and, 4) identify the source and/or sources of **funding** needed to fund the level of service. This re-evaluation will also require the review of historical response data, comparisons with other counties, and careful study of the potential for such incidents, in determining what is the best alternative for Santa Cruz County. The Environmental Health Service (**EHS**) has kept the Hazardous Materials Advisory Commission generally aware of the issues at hand. Due to the make-up of the Commission, it seems appropriate that the Board direct the Commission to study these issues and provide a recommendation for your consideration at June budget hearings. This report has been prepared in order to introduce and summarize the issue for your Board's consideration and direction.

Background:

For some time, Santa Cruz County has had Hazardous Materials Emergency Response capabilities offered through three resources: Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Services (**EHS**), Scotts Valley Fire Protection District (SVFPD), and City of Watsonville Fire Department (WFD). It is important to note that the service level provided by EHS is not equivalent to that of either SVFPD or WFD. EHS response capabilities are focused at a lower level, appropriate for the 100 or so small spills and complaints EHS receives each year. EHS personnel respond with a mini-van designed to categorize unknown substances and determine if the material being tested is hazardous or not. EHS personnel have strong chemistry backgrounds and are trained to the Specialist Level, which is the highest level of **HazMat** training offered by the California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI). Upon initial assessment and/or identification of a hazardous substance, EHS staff either arrange for the material to be cleaned up or, in conjunction with the incident commander, recommend initiating a higher level response.

The Scotts Valley Fire Protection District and the City of Watsonville Fire Department response capabilities are designed to respond to "worse case scenarios". The Hazardous Materials response vehicles maintained by these agencies are equipped with fully encapsulating suits (Level A), decontamination equipment, a team of hazmat responders, and a chemical identification kit like that found in the EHS mini-van. These response personnel all receive the same hazardous materials training as EHS personnel and are provided additional support from the first responding fire engine company. At this level of response, EHS provides technical support to the fire hazmat teams and ensures that at some point the site is rendered safe with regard to human health and the environment.

The acquisition of these higher level response vehicles by SVFPD and WFD came in different ways. WFD acquired their response vehicle through a State grant in 1984. As a provision of the grant, WFD was required to provide services county-wide for 5 years, at the end of which vehicle and equipment ownership was transferred to WFD. WFD met that 5 year obligation and continued to respond county-wide with the first hour of service being provided at no cost. Subsequent time, services, and supplies became the responsibility of the property owner (if one could be determined), the business owner (if the incident occurred at a business), or the fire agency requesting the service (if no one else could be found to pay). The cost of providing this service was subsidized by a permitting and inspection program for hazardous materials and underground storage tanks also managed by WFD. In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement was entered into by the County, the Cities of Watsonville, Capitola, Santa Cruz, and Scotts Valley, and the University of California at Santa Cruz, for the purpose of cost sharing. The County contributed \$3,300.00 and each City and the University contributed \$300.00 each annually for vehicle maintenance, insurance costs, replacement and upgrading of equipment and repair. This MOU expired in February of 1992.

In 1991, SVFPD bought their own vehicle and equipment in order to be prepared for incidents that might occur within their district. SVFPD also extended hazmat response services to any requesting fire agency, with the first hour of service at no cost. The cost of maintaining this service was also subsidized by a permitting and inspection program for hazardous materials and underground storage tanks managed by SVFPD. Response cost recovery efforts mirrored those of WFD and were generally un-recoverable or very slow at best. SVFPD did not have an MOU with any other jurisdiction to aid in their costs.

In January, 1997 EHS was designated by the Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) as the Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA) for the entire county. This decision effectively ended the ability of either fire agency to continue their respective permitting and inspection programs and as a result, eliminated their source of subsidy for their Hazardous Materials Response programs. Since 1997, both agencies have struggled to keep these services available to our community.

At this time, without outside financial support, both fire agencies have stated their intention to end their higher level emergency response teams in the near future.

Since 1997, the Chiefs from both fire agencies, the County's Office of Emergency Services, and EHS have been updating the County's Hazardous Materials Response Area Plan and discussing alternatives that would maximize interagency cooperation and coordination. The level of local response capabilities and its funding are major components of the Plan. Consolidation of services and resources seems to provide the greatest efficiencies and county-wide benefit. This concept represents a resourceful application of existing staff and equipment and is in line with larger established mutual aid agreements. In addition, it will foster greater cohesiveness among responders as a result of joint training exercises.

While negotiations continue with the fire agencies, current funding alternatives for a consolidated hazmat team include annual allocations for a "readiness to serve" and a fund account for immediate reimbursement of response team costs. Sources for these funds have not been determined. However the possibilities include: 1) cost sharing via a jurisdictional apportionment formula; 2) Proposition 172 funds; 3) County general funds; 4) Environmental Health Services fee increases; and/or, 5) State and Federal Grants and reimbursements. Additionally, some form of an agreement with the State will need to be secured if there is an expectation for the hazmat response team to respond to incidents that occur on State owned land (State Parks or Beaches).

Environmental Health Services will continue to provide information to the Hazardous Materials Advisory Commission, and in conjunction with the County's Office of Emergency Services, continue to work with the SVFPD and WFD, in: 1) determining the appropriate level of service; 2) determining how that level of service will best be rendered; 3) determining the allocation and/or re-allocation of resources; and, 4) identifying the source and/or sources of funding for whatever level of service is deemed appropriate.

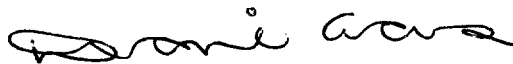
Recommendation:

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that your Board: 1) accept and file this report, 2) direct Environmental Health Services seek recommendations for the Board's review from the Hazardous Materials Advisory Commission, and 3) direct the Health Services Agency to report back to the Board by June 13, 2000 and address any financial implications during June budget hearings.

Sincerely,

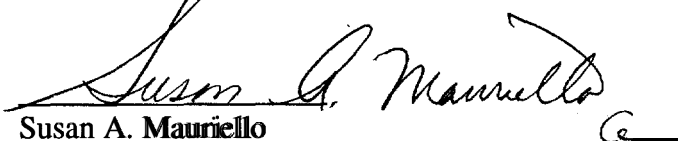


Rama Khalsa
Health Services Agency Administrator



Diane Evans, R.E.H.S.
Environmental Health Director

Recommended



Susan A. Mauriello
County Administrative Officer

- cc: CAO
County Counsel
Hazardous Materials Advisory Commission
Health Services Agency
Environmental Health
Chief Smith, Altos/La Selva Fire Department
Chief McMurry, Scotts Valley Fire Protection District
Chief Leon, City of Watsonville Fire Department