

Problem

The County of San Diego has adopted an Evacuation Plan with components dealing with public notification, evacuation, and care and shelter for evacuees. The public notification system has improved, the evacuation portion lacks agreements with mass transit and animal welfare, and the care and shelter section relies too heavily upon the American Red Cross.

Solutions

Public Notification

The new reverse notification system is capable of not only calling traditional land-line (hardwired) telephones, but cellular phones, pagers and email if programmed, although each device must be individually registered at www.AlertSanDiego.org. A looming crisis exists because of limited bandwidth of local cell sites unable to carry the large volume of cell phone notifications as phone registration increases. Technology now exists to provide site specific evacuation notices through a multitude of mobile- and home-based equipment (See Technology Issues).

Evacuation

The County's Office of Emergency Services needs to immediately formalize the agreements dealing with the utilization of mass transit (road and rail), the coordination of several jurisdictions evacuating simultaneously, animal evacuation coordination, and the difficulties of identifying and moving Special Needs populations.

Awareness of one's surroundings may be the key to individual survival. Residents who are in harm's way before an official evacuation order is issued, those who lack adequate transportation, and those who choose not to comply with an evacuation order may have to shelter in place. Education about how to prepare yourself and your property, what equipment is necessary, and hands-on training should be provided to interested residents.



Care and Shelter

The County's Emergency Plan, and Federal Charter, charge the American Red Cross (ARC) with the responsibility for care and shelter for evacuated persons. Based on the performance of the ARC after the initial hours of Firestorm 2007, it is obvious that ARC volunteers are victims first, and the ARC didn't have the resources to meet the countywide need for shelter.

The County needs to better publicize its ability to operate shelters, and encourage all local jurisdictions to train and equip staff and volunteers to establish and operate independent local shelters.

References:

San Diego County Operational Area Evacuation Plan