



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



Emergency Services Council Committee Meeting Minutes

September 17, 2025

This meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm by Council Chair Lisa Gauthier.

I. Roll Call

Atherton	Council Member Hawkins-Manuelian	Not Present
Belmont	Council Member McCune	Present
Brisbane	Council Member Lentz	Present
Burlingame	Council Member Pappajohn	Present
Colma	Council Member Slaughter	Not Present
Daly City	Council Member Sylvester	Present
East Palo Alto	Council Member Barragan	Present
Foster City	Council Member Niederhofer	Present
Half Moon Bay	Council Member Jonsson	Present
Hillsborough	Council Member Chuang	Not Present
Menlo Park	Council Member Combs	Not Present
Millbrae	Council Member Rainaldi	Present
Pacifica	Council Member Boles	Present
Portola Valley	Council Member Flynn	Present
Redwood City	Council Member Eakin	Present
San Bruno	Council Vice Chair Medina	Present
San Carlos	Council Member Dugan	Present
San Mateo	Council Member Newsom	Not Present
South San Francisco	Council Member Flores	Present
Woodside	Council Member Goeld	Present
County of San Mateo	Council Chair Gauthier	Present

Attending County Representatives:

- Deputy County Executive Ely, County Executive's Office
- Director Dhapodkar, Department of Emergency Management
- Program Services Manager II Passey, Department of Emergency Management
- Clerk of the Committee Jen, Department of Emergency Management
- Secretary of the Committee Haddad, Department of Emergency Management

- II. Public Comments, Correspondence, Announcements
 - No public comment
- III. Action to Set Agenda and Approve June 11, 2025, Meeting Minutes
 - Approved without objection or abstention
- IV. Glenwood Camp Update – CALFIRE Presentation
 - Assistant Chief Norwine presented an update on the Glenwood Fire Center. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and San Mateo County are working in partnership to transform the aging Glenwood Boys Ranch into a modern facility capable of housing and supporting CAL FIRE hand crews to benefit both wildfire preparedness and community safety. At the Glenwood Fire Center, CAL FIRE will increase capacity to respond to emergencies, allow crews to perform vital fuel-reduction and vegetation-management projects, and improve fire roads in San Mateo County. Glenwood Fire Center strategically sits in San Mateo County to directly support communities.
 - The lease was executed in August 2025. November 1 is tentatively the target date for completion. Drainage issues pushed back the target date by one month.
 - CAL FIRE has been allotted funding for two peak fire seasons. Fire seasons in California have now been extended to almost a year. (March 15 – December 15).
 - Funding for Glenwood Fire Center covers 80 seasonal firefighters, 6 engineers, 1 Battalion Chief, and 1 Division Chief to oversee the program, in addition to seasonal staff. Approximately 40 people will be on duty daily. CAL FIRE cited retention challenges for permanent crews because of salary and commuting considerations. County Service Area No. 7 (CSA 7) water restrictions were cited as a limiting factor for the facility.
- V. Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JPA) Update
 - Director Dhapodkar reported that every city and town in San Mateo County has finalized the process to approve the joint exercise of powers agreement (JPA). Following technical approval, the San Mateo County Department of Emergency Management (SMC EM) will send the JPA to each city and town for signage and as a permanent record. Director Dhapodkar will inform the ESC upon completion of the JPA's final signing by all cities and towns.
- VI. Director's Year in Review
 - Director Dhapodkar described the year as remarkable and thanked the Emergency Services Council (ESC) for supporting SMC EM on alert and warning, community outreach, and all-hazard evacuation planning.
 - Alert and Warning
 - San Mateo County is building capabilities for alert and warning that have been recognized by national and international news. Director Dhapodkar stated that we are working towards a countywide policy on alert and warning, supported by a world-renowned researcher who assisted SMC EM in developing 40 alert and warning templates. The action-oriented templates speak to parts of the brain that are activated during an emergency.
 - SMC EM has prioritized socializing the templates across agencies and providing training and resources to ensure we get alerts and warnings right. This week,

SMC EM is hosting another alert and warning training exercise for operators and policymakers, and the outcomes will be shared with city managers for their sign-off. There is much work to be done on alert and warning in the next year.

- Community Outreach
 - From August 2024 – July 2025, SMC EM hosted 32 outreach events to increase emergency preparedness in the community.
 - Director Dhapodkar stated SMC EM looks at the community as a whole and is meeting communities where they are – in their languages. SMC EM used to be mono-lingual, and now staff speak more than 5 languages to engage with our county effectively. At minimum, SMC EM materials are offered in Spanish, Chinese, and English.
 - SMC EM designed a survey to inform the development of a roadmap that identifies what is needed before, during, and after disasters. The survey will help SMC EM better understand gaps in community preparedness and build bridges.
- Training Exercises
 - From August 2024 – July 2025, SMC EM hosted 17 training exercises with partners, covering a multitude of hazards, including wildfires, weapons of mass destruction, flooding, and earthquake scenarios. Regular training with partners has built capabilities and executive-level critical thinking skills.
 - Director Dhapodkar reported that community-based organizations (CBOs) were included in training exercises this year as SMC EM has prioritized CBO relationship building.
- No public comment.

VII. Recommended 2026 Meeting Calendar

- San Carlos motioned to approve; South San Francisco seconded the motion.
- Motion to approve with 10 Ayes and 6 Nays.

VIII. Alert & Warning Presentation and Discussion

- Dr. Sutton stated that the County of San Mateo’s alert and warning system demonstrates an evidence-based approach and is better than most. Dr. Jeanette Sutton recommended five elements (source, hazard, location, guidance, time) that should be included in alert and warning messages. The five elements are captured in the SMC EM templates available on the county website.
- Dr. Sutton affirmed that SMC EM has built a strong foundation for its alert and warning system, and refining these systems is a continuous improvement process. SMC EM provides office hours and technical assistance, and recently released a training video for the SMC alert system.
- Dr. Sutton presented findings from her 25 years of research on alert and warning messages. Her research found that ineffective, or “bad,” messages are often incomplete, lack sufficient detail, contain jargon that leads to misunderstanding, or fail to specify geographic areas. Other types of bad messages include false alerts, threats irrelevant to individuals, and alerts issued at times when the public cannot take action. Such ineffective messaging erodes public trust in alert and warning systems, leading people to seek information through alternative channels or to ignore future alerts altogether. In some cases, recipients may even disable alert notifications entirely.

Dr. Sutton emphasized that these issues can be addressed with templates, improved training, and stronger policy guidance.

- Dr. Sutton recommended that alert and warning messages be constructed with clear, consistent language and that when the communication language has been opened, it must be closed. Alert and warning systems must inform the public when it is safe to resume and provide guidance on how to return.
- The Woodside Council Member summarized the town's recent experience and lessons learned with the SMC alert during an August 2025 fire. The Council Member encouraged further training and exercises regarding the SMC alert, as it is a critical system for the County. In the case of the August Woodside fire, the Portola Valley and County of San Mateo Council Members recommended a post-incident "all clear" message to close the loop and help the ESC respond to questions.
- The San Carlos Council Member asked if SMC alerts have a filter to prevent messages from being sent with brackets. SMC EM responded that it is working with the vendor to stop messages from being sent with brackets, as part of the lessons learned from the recent Woodside fire.
- As a lesson learned from a recent tsunami warning, the Half Moon Bay Council Member said that after sending an SMC alert, everyone fled to Highway 92 and did not know where to go. Director Dhapodkar shared that SMC EM responded to this public concern by creating a tsunami viewer to provide more information about affected and safe areas, with over 78,000 people visiting the website. To supplement the National Weather Service (NWS) information, SMC EM aims to provide the public with more nuanced information. Some coastal areas have also been identified as temporary evacuation centers in hazard evacuation plans. Following the recent tsunami advisory, SMC EM received no complaints.
- Director Dhapodkar confirmed that the 32 local agencies have sending rights for SMC alerts. Further, she explained that SMC alerts reach subscribers even in areas without cell reception, even when they are connected to Wi-Fi, unlike a wireless emergency alert (WEA), which relies on a connection to a cell tower. Director Dhapodkar underlined the strategy for redundant systems to maximize emergency communication capabilities.
- Public comment from Dena Gunning, Emergency Manager at Central County Fire Department and President of San Mateo County Emergency Managers Association (SMC EMA), encouraged ESC members to foster relationships with local emergency managers who serve as the points of contact for alert and warning training and messaging for jurisdictions. SMC EMA meets bimonthly and is available to answer questions and support public preparedness efforts.
- Public comment from Ann Schneider, former Mayor of Millbrae, who requested an update on pre-COVID efforts to register everyone in the county. She expressed concern that Millbrae was being exposed to chemicals from San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and asked about SMC EM coordination with SFO on alert messages regarding chemical spills and evacuations. Director Dhapodkar responded that SMC EM has explored purchasing resident lists for the county, which would yield 10% more names and require several privacy waivers. In case of emergency, SMC alerts, the Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS), TV messages, and radio will publicize alerts. Director Dhapodkar confirmed SMC EM partners with SFO emergency management.

- IX. Report Outs Related to Emergency Services Council
- The South San Francisco Council Member provided that the city police and fire departments of South San Francisco, Redwood City, San Bruno, and the U.S. Coast Guard performed a simulated emergency response rehearsal for a plane crash and expressed interest in a lessons learned briefing. Director Dhapodkar confirmed SMC EM's participation and willingness to provide a briefing.
- X. Adjournment
- The meeting was adjourned at 6:54 pm.