

# NEWS

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**For Immediate Release**

## **A New Name for an Expanding Mission: Department of Emergency Management**

*“Frequency and complexity” of emergencies prompts change*

**Redwood City** – At 1,762 pages, San Mateo County’s [2021 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan](#) achieves a lofty distinction: it’s longer than Tolstoy’s “War and Peace” and Márquez’s “100 Years of Solitude” *combined*.

Yet that length (filled with far more charts, graphs and acronyms than the novels, of course) highlights why County Manager Mike Callagy made a change: the County’s Office of Emergency Services is now the Department of Emergency Management.

### **At a Glance:**

The County of San Mateo’s Office of Emergency Services is now the Department of Emergency Management, or DEM.

The promotion to a County department reflects the importance of emergency planning and preparedness as well as emergency response.

County Manager Mike Callagy said the “frequency and complexity” of emergencies prompted the change.

It might sound minor, but the promotion to a County department “is an opportunity to better illustrate to the public, our partners and County employees its role in managing emergency preparation and response,” Callagy said.

“What we are seeing is an increase in the frequency and complexity of emergencies,” Callagy said. “The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 wildfires are the most visible emergencies, but we also face ongoing risks and threats from sea level rise, wildfires, tsunamis, earthquakes and severe weather. The Department of Emergency Management will work with both the public and private sectors to help raise our level of preparedness across the board.”

The Department of Emergency Management, or DEM, is responsible for:

- Alerting and notifying appropriate agencies within the county's 20 cities when disaster strikes
- Coordinating response
- Ensuring resources are available and mobilized in times of disaster
- Developing and providing preparedness materials
- Developing plans and procedures in response to and recovery from disasters

“While managing emergencies is always foremost on our minds, it’s the planning and preparedness where we really focus much of our time and energy,” said Dan Belville, DEM’s director.

“For instance, the Hazard Mitigation Plan is our county’s blueprint for reducing the risk from natural and man-made disasters,” Belville said. “It’s a lengthy document but a necessary document that we can use to secure funding from a variety of sources to reduce those risks.”

Callagy called the transition of the Office of Emergency Services – once a branch of the Sheriff’s Office, most recently a division within the County Manager’s Office – to its own department an evolution.

“The COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires and other responses have shed a light on just how critical a strong and well-understood DEM is for San Mateo County,” he said. “It now has a new name befitting its importance.”

The department has an authorized staff of 10 full-time employees who provide support to first responders as well as prepare and plan for emergencies. Look for the new name and the new logo on trucks, vans, trailers and other vehicles operated by DEM.

### **DEM’s role in the emergency response system**

On a day-to-day basis, DEM coordinates disaster plans and exercises with other County departments, all 20 cities and other partner agencies. Staff provide expertise to support the Board of Supervisors, County Manager and [Emergency Services Council](#), which includes representatives from local governments, nonprofit organizations and other partners.

DEM also ensures the County’s Regional Operations Center is ready around-the-clock and provides a duty officer on a 24-hour basis to address inquiries and concerns from County, local, and state officials regarding potential or escalating emergency conditions.

In an emergency, response typically begins with an individual calling 9-1-1. Local police and fire departments respond.

If that emergency is escalating – requiring multiple agencies and, for instance, evacuations, those first-responders call DEM. Response specialists help coordinate the overall effort and can connect with local, regional, state and federal agencies depending on the need.



The County's Emergency Operations Center, for instance, has been activated continuously for more than 640 days to help coordinate response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Go to DEM's website for more information: <https://cmo.smcgov.org/department-emergency-management>

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