

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

Board of Supervisors Authorizes County of San Mateo to Distribute Surplus Safety Equipment

Redwood City — Dozens of nonprofit organizations and government agencies will receive surplus gowns, goggles and cleaning materials initially purchased for COVID-19 protection following the Board of Supervisors today authorizing the county manager to distribute the supplies.

Last fall, approximately \$7 million worth of supplies stored at the San Mateo Event Center were left outdoors during a rainstorm. The County of San Mateo purchased this equipment early in the pandemic when jurisdictions across the country were competing to secure the materials needed to keep the community and frontline workers safe in the midst of uncertain circumstances. Most of these non-medical-grade supplies were individually wrapped in plastic inside the boxes that got wet and were not damaged. The Board's direction at today's meeting authorizes County staff to begin distributing the still-usable equipment to organizations in need.

"While we deeply regret the damage that occurred during last fall's rainy season, we are grateful the vast majority of the supplies are still usable and can support purposes including wildfire clean up, disaster relief and other emergency response efforts," said County Manager Mike Callagy. "As we move forward, we encourage local community-based organizations that have a need for these supplies to reach out with their request as we are committed to deploying these supplies in ways that protect the well-being and safety of the community."

The County is working with the nonprofit Wine Country Marines to distribute these resources to other organizations and government agencies, including entities in San Mateo County, who can use them for a variety of purposes. The County will also work with other organizations who can use the materials and meet the appropriate criteria. Any damaged packaging and unusable supplies will be disposed of properly.

"We, and the groups we partner with, are grateful that the County of San Mateo is dedicated to finding new purposes for this equipment rather than see it destroyed or go unused," said James Brown, president of Wine Country Marines, a Sonoma-based charity with Bay Area and nationwide networks, and himself a San Mateo County resident.

The supplies designated today as surplus were intended for use by individuals working in medical congregant settings early in the pandemic if hospitals became totally overwhelmed — a situation

that fortunately never occurred. In the months prior to the supplies being moved outdoors, the County also worked with the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to offer these surplus supplies free of charge to health care providers and other government agencies, including schools, and other jurisdictions, but few accepted the offer because sizes, quantities and other considerations made them less appropriate. County officials expressed gratitude that organizations can now use them for a variety of safety uses.

“Yes, we made a mistake. Humans make mistakes. But the important thing is that we owned up to it and thankfully are finding that these supplies do not need to go to waste,” said County Supervisor Carole Groom.

Board President Don Horsley added that the Board wants to understand — just as much as residents do — how the situation occurred and identify ways to prevent future errors. He also said this event does not take away from the fact that the County, in obtaining the supplies in the first place, was motivated by a desire to keep the community safe.

“In the darkest days, when we didn’t know what supplies we’d be able to get and just how much we’d need, the County did everything in its power to purchase what we could to keep us safe. In hindsight, we didn’t need it and organizations we tried sharing it with didn’t need it either. I am just glad to see that it can still address important needs,” Horsley said.

The County maintains a separate collection of medical-grade personal protective equipment for first-responders or other front-line workers, and damages from this incident did not impact the County’s COVID-19 response efforts.

Organizations and government agencies interested in receiving supplies should address inquiries to “Supply Manager” at smcdonatedsupplies@smcgov.org.

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