



August 21, 2020

Anne Grandlund, Foreperson
2019-2020 Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury
725 Court Street
P.O. Box 431
Martinez, CA 94553-0091
Email: ctadmin@contracosta.courts.ca.gov
Via U.S. Mail and Email

RE: Grand Jury Report No. 2007, "Wildfire Preparedness in Contra Costa County"

Dear Ms. Grandlund:

On behalf of the City of El Cerrito, this letter serves as a response to Grand Jury Report No. 2007, "Wildfire Preparedness in Contra Costa County," by the Contra Costa Grand Jury. In accordance with your request and Section 933.05 of the California Government Code, the City is responding as required to Findings F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, and F8 and Recommendations R5, R6, and R7 as outlined in the Grand Jury Report.

FINDINGS:

F1. During a Red Flag Warning, fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County often deploy pre-positioned firefighting strike teams to maximize the ability to respond to wildfires.

RESPONSE: The City of El Cerrito agrees with this finding.

F2. Fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County require property owners to perform weed abatement on their property to reduce the risk of fire spread.

RESPONSE: The City of El Cerrito agrees with this finding.

F3. Not all fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County use predetermined polygons and routing algorithms in their evacuation plans.

RESPONSE: The City of El Cerrito agrees with this finding.

F4. Fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County recommend that residents comply with law enforcement's orders to evacuate during an emergency.

RESPONSE: The City of El Cerrito agrees with this finding.

F5. Not all fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County use new technologies, such as ground sensors, drones, satellites, and fire spotting cameras, for early detection of fires.

RESPONSE: The City of El Cerrito agrees with this finding, but it should be noted that many of the above listed technologies are in the development and testing phase. One example are the ground sensors that are still in a research and development stage that



have been tested successfully but are still not commercially available. ALERTWildfire, a consortium of three universities, has provided access to their state-of-the-art cameras in this County that help discover, locate and confirm fire as well as increase situational awareness. While the AI technology for the fire spotting cameras is being developed and tested, this level of detection is still not available for commercial application through this system.

F6. The October 2019 Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events disrupted emergency response efforts and communications in Contra Costa County.

RESPONSE: The City of El Cerrito agrees with this finding.

F7. Fire districts and fire departments in Contra Costa County are not always informed by PG&E when the utility is performing non-emergency maintenance work that presents a high fire risk during a Red Flag Warning.

RESPONSE: The City of El Cerrito agrees with this finding.

F8. An ordinance passed by the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, requiring PG&E to give advance notice of non-emergency maintenance work that presents a high fire risk, enables the fire district to pre-position a team at the utility worksite and recover labor and equipment costs.

RESPONSE: The City of El Cerrito agrees with the finding in so far as our interpretation of San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District's written ordinance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R5. The City Councils of El Cerrito, Pinole and Richmond should consider directing their Fire Chief to update wildfire evacuation plans and incorporate pre-determined polygons and advanced routing technology, by June 30, 2021.

RESPONSE: The recommendation has been implemented in 2019 and tested through a cooperative agreement with Zonehaven, Inc., a software company based in San Francisco. Currently in Contra Costa County, this program is only operational in Orinda and Moraga as sponsored by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and in El Cerrito and the community of Kensington as sponsored by the El Cerrito Fire Department. However, the Contra Costa County Fire Chiefs Association has supported a Bay area UASI grant application for \$300,000 to provide funding for the procurement and implementation of a software program that will provide a uniform evacuation planning platform for the entire County. The grant was approved last year with funding to be available later this year.

R6. The City Councils of El Cerrito, Pinole and Richmond should consider identifying funds to adopt or expand the use of new technologies, such as ground sensors, drones, satellites, and fire spotting cameras, to help detect fires in high-risk areas, by June 30, 2021

RESPONSE: This recommendation has been partially implemented from both a local and Countywide platform. Since 2015, El Cerrito/Kensington has had a UAV (drone) with a high-resolution camera as well as infrared and thermo scanning capabilities to use for search and rescue as well as fire detection in the urban interface when needed. However, to consider the UAV as an early detection tool is not accurate at this time as it is not usually



used in a patrol mode but rather to investigate an area where smoke has been spotted. Additionally, drone use around a working vegetation fire is prohibited as it can interfere with aerial firefighting resources such as helicopters and planes.

Over the last two years, the Contra Costa County fire agencies have supported the independent work of ALERTWildfire and the numerous cameras that have been installed on behalf of PG&E as well as Cal Fire that provide visual access to many of the parks and wildland interface areas of the County. These cameras can be controlled by the Contra Costa County Regional Fire Communication Center (CCRFCC) as well as the County Fire/Rescue Mutual Aid Coordinator and various other Chief officers to move and focus in on a given locations and confirm a fire and its size and dispatch appropriate resources. CFRCC also has access to real-time satellite detection of fires as provided by PG&E. They can use this information to confirm a fire, often undetected in a remote area and dispatch fire resources as well as support the operation with real time data. This technology can be considered as early detection.

Many of the local fire agencies within Contra Costa County have been working individually, and collectively, on researching or implementing many of the other technologies referenced such as the ground sensors but they have not proven to be feasible at this time. Many others are still in development and testing stages and are not commercially available.

R7. The City Councils of El Cerrito, Pinole and Richmond should review and consider mechanisms, such as the ordinance passed by the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, that would enable their fire district to recover labor and equipment costs from PG&E for overseeing electrical utility work that presents a high fire risk, by June 30, 2021.

RESPONSE: This recommendation requires further analysis. At this point, it is unclear whether PG&E can be regulated by a local agency. It is our understanding that there are legal challenges from PG&E to San Ramon Valley Fire's ordinance. Outcomes of these challenges will provide a clearer direction for other agencies to potentially proceed and will open the door to other local regulations of all PG&E's work being conducted in our response area. There is no set time for any resolution and implementation is not possible until the legal matters are settled.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or require additional information concerning the above responses. You can reach me directly at (510) 215-4301 or by email at kpinkos@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen E. Pinkos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karen E. Pinkos
City Manager
City of El Cerrito

cc: El Cerrito City Council