

King County Office of Emergency Management

Report No. 92-1

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ▶ [Introduction and Background](#)
 - ▶ [Objective and Scope](#)
 - ▶ [Summary Statement of Findings](#)
 - ▶ Major Findings:
 - ▶ [Finding](#) - Emergency management resources inadequate statewide.
 - ▶ [Finding](#) - Other agencies made progressive contributions to County emergency services.
 - ▶ [Finding](#) - Greater organizational authority would enhance office's operation.
 - ▶ [Finding](#) - SARA Title III Emergency Response Plan did not meet Federal requirements.
 - ▶ [Finding](#) - Alternative support available to fund SARA Title III Program.
 - ▶ [Finding](#) - Industry compliance with SARA Title III Program not encouraged.
 - ▶ [Finding](#) - Weak local Planning Committee resulted in burden on King County.
 - ▶ [Finding](#) - Public education, training, planning and coordination needed.
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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A special study of King County's Office of Emergency Management was requested by the 1991 County Council Chair of the Operations and Administration Services Committee. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the Office of Emergency Management's resources, workplan and general operations. In addition, a survey of the resources and organizational location of emergency management functions in other jurisdictions was conducted.

An operating budget of approximately \$230,000 and 4.0 full-time positions were allocated for the Office of Emergency Management during 1991. In addition, two full-time commissioned officers assigned to the Special Operations Division Search and Rescue Program staffed several emergency management functions.

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The study objectives were to evaluate the Office of Emergency Management's general operations, resources, and organizational authority. The County's emergency management operations were analyzed to determine both their current effectiveness and potential for an enhanced County-wide emergency management function.

The scope of the study was limited to the review and evaluation of the County's emergency management function. The study methodology included a review of all Federal, State and County laws and policies related to emergency management. The Office of Emergency Management operations plan and annual work program were also reviewed to determine their adequacy and consistency with legal mandates and policies. In addition, emergency management officials throughout the State of Washington and King County were surveyed to determine the availability and quality of emergency resources, and the organizational authority for emergency management programs.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

The general conclusion of the study was that improvements were needed to provide effective emergency management services, and to provide an effective County-wide emergency management function, if desired by the County Council.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1. Emergency management resources inadequate statewide.

Emergency management agencies in Washington State generally did not have sufficient resources to provide comprehensive, integrated emergency management services. Consequently, staffing, facilities, and equipment allocated to the King County Office of Emergency Management were inadequate to provide for effective emergency management operations and services.

The study recommended that the Office of Emergency Management, in cooperation with the Department of Public Safety, identify an adequate staffing allocation when the staff are fully trained, and identify facilities and equipment both for its daily operations as well as for a back-up command center during a significant emergency. The Office of Emergency Management should also investigate all potential private and public sources of funding for the emergency

management program (e.g., fees-for-services, grants, and in-kind or technical contributions).

Finding 2. Other agencies made progressive contributions to County emergency services.

The County's emergency management services have progressed particularly due to the resources and efforts of other agencies. These resources and services need to be recognized in the future development of the Office of Emergency Management to ensure that well-coordinated, non-duplicative services are provided throughout the County.

The study recommended that the Office of Emergency Management improve its coordination with internal County and community-based agencies to ensure all available emergency services are sufficiently documented and accessible during disasters and are utilized in the most efficient manner.

Finding 3. Greater organizational authority would enhance office's operation.

The Office of Emergency Management would benefit from greater organizational authority to effectively manage a County-wide emergency services program.

The study recommended that the Executive and the Department of Public Safety continue to facilitate the development of a professional emergency management function in King County. When the Office of Emergency Management is fully operational, the Council should consider further elevating the status of the emergency services organization in King County, particularly if a County-wide program is desired.

Finding 4. SARA Title III Emergency Response Plan did not meet Federal requirements.

King County's hazardous materials emergency response plan did not meet federal requirements or guidelines. Given the inadequacy of the plan, the response to a major hazardous spill in King County would be uncoordinated.

The study recommended that the Office of Emergency Management, in conjunction with the King County Local Emergency Planning Committee, revise the local emergency response plan to meet all federal requirements. The Office of Emergency Management should also hold regular County-wide exercises of the King County hazardous materials emergency response plan, in cooperation with all potential emergency responders. Finally, the Emergency Management Manager should exchange current information with the Fire Chiefs Association, as a primary responder, on the status of emergency service improvements.

Finding 5. Alternative support available to fund SARA Title III Program.

The federal government made no appropriation to fund the SARA Title III program, and the

County had not followed through on identifying alternate funding. However, other jurisdictions have successfully developed alternative SARA Title III program funding.

The study recommended that King County explore, at a minimum, the option of assessing fees to all cities within the King County planning district for SARA Title III services. Methods of raising funds for the SARA Title III program from private industry should also be explored

Finding 6. Industry compliance with SARA Title III Program not encouraged.

King County did not aggressively pursue outreach or enforcement activities to encourage industry compliance with the SARA Title III program requirements. As a result, many firms in King County were not in compliance with the law.

The study recommended that the Office of Emergency Management coordinate resources with the Fire Marshal's Office to locate firms using hazardous materials, thereby eliminating the redundant efforts of the two offices. The Office of Emergency Management, in cooperation with the Fire Marshal's Office, should also develop a proposal to increase the HazMat permit fee assessed by the Fire Marshal to increase funding for the County SARA Title III program, and explore options for greater enforcement of the program.

Finding 7. Weak local planning committee resulted in burden on King County.

Since King County did not have a strong Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), the responsibility for the SARA Title III program rested solely upon County government. As a result, the SARA Title III program was unmanageable for the Office of Emergency Management.

The study recommended that the Office of Emergency Management begin the process of rebuilding the LEPC by seeking broader-based participation on the LEPC and utilizing the resources of all members.

Finding 8. Public education, training, planning and coordination needed.

The enhancement of the County's emergency management function would require concentration of resources in the areas of public education, training, planning, and County-wide coordination of emergency services.

The study recommended that the Office of Emergency Management emphasize the above factors in rebuilding the County's emergency management function. The Office of Emergency Management should also serve as both an internal County and community-wide resource for all phases of disaster education, planning, training, and coordination, if the Council determines that an integrated, County-wide resource is desirable.

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