

COUNTY OF SONOMA

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Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan first in state to incorporate cultural competency

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors today, approved the 2022 Sonoma County Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan, the first in the state to incorporate cultural competency. The plan marks significant strides in the coordination between agencies and jurisdictions within Sonoma County to ensure the protection of life, property, and the environment in the event of a major emergency incident or disaster.

March 22, 2022

Santa Rosa, CA (California) - March 22, 2022 - The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors today, approved the 2022 Sonoma County Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan, the first in the state to incorporate cultural competency. The plan marks significant strides in the coordination between agencies and jurisdictions within Sonoma County to ensure the protection of life, property, and the environment in the event of a major emergency incident or disaster.

"Sonoma County has become a nationwide leader in proactive Emergency Management," said James Gore, chair of the Board of Supervisors. "With today's action, we step forward as the first county in California to implement cultural responsiveness into our system. We have seen the inequity of disaster management first hand, and this action demonstrates a powerful step towards building a more just and equitable future."

The plan was developed with considerable feedback from local community members and organizations to resolve issues related to cultural responsiveness. State legislation SB 160, passed in 2019, requires counties to integrate cultural competence into any new emergency plans.

"We have learned many lessons in emergency response since 2017, not just as an organization but as a community. This plan is the culmination of lessons learned and best practices with the overarching goal of keeping every single person in this county safe and informed before, during and after emergencies," said Chris Godley, director of the Department of Emergency Management.

Historically, underserved communities in the county, including monolingual Spanish speakers, did not have access to information in their native language and encountered difficulty navigating official instructions. SB 160 authorized counties to establish community advisory groups for the purpose of engaging "culturally diverse communities" in providing input into the development of the Emergency Operations Plan. Coordination of the plan was led by the county Department of Emergency Management and the Office of Equity who coordinated the involvement of groups who advocate to resolve issues related to cultural responsiveness during emergencies including: Just Recovery Partnership (a collaborative funded by Latino Community Foundation made up of La Luz, Corazon Healdsburg, Raizes Collective, KBBF Radio, Movimiento Cultural de la Unión Indígena and North Bay Organizing Project), North Bay Jobs with Justice, and NBOP's Immigrant Defense Task Force. Through the plan development process, 137 recommendations raised by the community advisory group and community members were considered and dozens were incorporated into the plan.

"The recommendations from community members who have long experienced underservice and underrepresentation provide a clear path to how we can do better as a County," said Alegría De La Cruz, the director of the Office of Equity. "As we develop stronger partnerships with these community members and organizations, we will have more capacity and ability to survive and thrive in the face of our challenges."

Recommendations incorporated into the 2022 plan include:

- simultaneous English and Spanish emergency alerts;
- social media and website information on emergency preparedness, response and recovery resources in English and Spanish, including information at local assistance centers;
- support for the development of Communities Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) as a network for providing services;
- clearly identifiable and trained translators at local assistance centers;
- elimination of questions regarding immigration status at evacuation shelters, a practice in alignment with federal policies;

- inclusion of immigrant and Spanish-speaking community members in future disaster response planning;
- increased education about alert and warning systems for the Spanish-speaking community.

The plan will be reviewed and revised every three years or when notable updates warrant documentation, evaluation, or assessment.

Learn more about the [2022 Emergency Operations Plan](#).

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Page Links

1. 2022 Emergency Operations Plan. - <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/sonoma-county-emergency-operations-plan-first-in-state-to-incorporate-cultural-competency/administrative-support-and-fiscal-services/emergency-management/plans>