

COUNTY OF MARIN  
OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

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Matthew H. Hymel  
County Administrator

June 3, 2008

Honorable Verna Adams  
Presiding Judge  
Marin County Superior Court  
3501 Civic Center Drive  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Dear Judge Adams:

Forwarded herewith is the Marin County Board of Supervisors' response (incorporating those for the Chief Administrator's Office, the Department of Public Works; the Department of Health and Human Services; and the Sheriff's Office (for the Disaster Council) to the 2007-2008 Grand Jury Report "*Emergency Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe.*")

The Board of Supervisors' response addresses all Findings and Recommendations for which a response was requested from the Board of Supervisors and the related agencies.

Respectfully submitted,



Charles McGlashan  
President, Board of Supervisors

cc: Civil Grand Jury

## RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM

**Report Title:** Emergency Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe  
**Report Date:** March 13, 2008  
**Response by:** Marin County Board of Supervisors  
Marin County Administrator

### FINDINGS

- We agree with the findings numbered: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12
- We disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: 1, 7, 8, 10, 11

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered 1 and 2 have not been implemented and require further analysis.

(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.)

Date:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



Number of pages attached: 3

**Marin County Board of Supervisors**  
Response to Findings and Recommendations from Grand Jury Report  
*"Emergency Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe – March 13, 2008"*

**FINDINGS**

**F1 – MERA began as a communications system for first responders for use in emergencies.**

Response: Disagree.

In February 1997 public safety agencies in Marin County – many but not all of those that might be considered "first responders" -- agreed to begin developing a proposal for a Countywide regional communications system. Under a joint powers agreement, the Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA) was founded to accomplish this task. The system will unify public safety response, making it possible for members to more effectively and efficiently communicate with each other and within individual departments, during emergency and other situations when deemed necessary.

**F2 – MERA has evolved into a general network embracing most of Marin's public service and public safety day-to-day communications. Emergencies are one segment of its function.**

Response: Agree.

**F3 – No public or private school in Marin is part of MERA.**

Response: Agree.

**F4 – Marin County is a likely candidate for a major disaster at any time.**

Response: Agree.

**F5 – The present public school emergency radio communication system is about to go belly up, leaving the schools with no emergency radio communications capabilities.**

Response: Agree.

School District radios are in need of replacement, although they are still operational. Some of the base stations no longer are FCC- acceptable as they operate today. Parts are no longer available for two out of the three mountain top radios and parts are no longer available for any of the District radios or the dispatch console at the main office.

**F6 – Repeated attempts by the Marin County Office of Education to fund MERA in the schools have failed to raise any money.**

Response: Agree.

However, as a separate entity, the County is generally not part of the County Office of Education's budget or revenue matters.

**F7 – Money from Homeland Security grants for MERA radios in the schools has not been made available because of questionable interpretations of Homeland Security Guidelines by local authorities.**

Response: Disagree.

The guidelines focus the use of funds on first-responder activities, a category that does not include schools.

**F8 – Money has been the stumbling block for MERA radios in the schools. The immediate need for an emergency radio communication system for Marin's schools has been trumped by the lack of financing and what seems to be a widespread attitude that puts money before school safety.**

Response: Partially Disagree.

The County's schools are responsible for setting their spending priorities. Although it is likely that money has been a stumbling block for the schools, it may not be the only one.

**F9 – Both the Red Cross and the Department of Health and Human Services recognize the importance of school sites as gathering places in times of emergency. Both have contracted with various school districts for their use in times of crises.**

Response: Agree.

**F10 – There is a belief that installing MERA radios now could instill a false sense of security in the schools, because in any major crisis the MERA system would be overwhelmed with any immediate help unlikely in spite of MERA.**

Response: Partially Disagree.

Concerns with the overloading of the system and the need to ensure immediate help when needed are what is driving current MERA planning.

**F11 – An Alternate plan to equip the schools with an emergency radio communications system that could be outside the MERA radio network is in an early stage of consideration.**

Response: Partially Disagree.

The County is awaiting input from the schools regarding their operational requirements to determine the appropriate system to install.

**F12 – The County has recently received a \$16 million windfall from Sacramento with no strings attached.**

Response: Agree.

Although these funds are discretionary, the County has many identified capital and deferred maintenance needs. For example, the County's roads have an unfunded deferred maintenance need in excess of \$200 million. Further, the County needs to fund an Emergency Operations Center that would allow for uninterrupted communications dispatch and MERA services during a major seismic event.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1: The Board of Supervisors, the Marin Emergency Radio Authority, the Disaster Council, the Marin County Office of Education, the Marin County Office of Emergency Services, the Marin County Department of Public Works, the Marin County Administrator's Office, the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services, the various public school districts and the private schools should immediately work together to fund and install the MERA system and its radios in all of Marin's public and private schools.**

Agree with parts of the recommendation and plan to implement; part of the recommendation requires further analysis. County and school representatives have been meeting to identify the schools' operational requirements. The County is waiting to learn the results of the schools' assessment of their needs; and after consideration of these needs the parties will identify the proper approach – MERA or an "800 system" – that will best fit the schools' requirements. Once this is completed, the schools will determine the appropriate next steps.

**R2 – In the event it is determined that MERA is not a feasible option for Marin's schools, an effective, alternative emergency radio communication network, independent of MERA, should be immediately modeled, funded and installed in Marin's public and private schools through their collective efforts of the entities identified in Recommendation 1 (R1) above.**

Agree with parts of the recommendation and plan to implement; part of the recommendation requires further analysis. Once the system requirements are determined, County staff can work with the schools to identify the best equipment to use to achieve their requirements. Although the County will work with the schools to support this effort, the schools are responsible for setting funding priorities for the system improvements.