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**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY OF TUOLUMNE**

Ryan Campbell, *Second District*

**FILED**  
Heather Ryan  
Board Clerk

**AUG 27 2020**

**Superior Court of California  
County of Tuolumne**

By: Diana Feeley Clerk

Anaiah Kirk, *Third District*  
Karl Rodefer, *Fifth District*

August 18, 2020

Judge of Superior Court  
Honorable Kate Powell Segerstrom  
Tuolumne County Superior Court  
60 North Washington Street  
Sonora, CA 95370

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report – **Tuolumne County Fire Safety Report**

**Grand Jury Findings**

**F1.** The Matrix Report gives conflicting information when explaining different options for the improvement of Tuolumne County's fire protection delivery system. There is disagreement among those who had input into the Matrix Report regarding its findings and recommendations.

**Response: Agree**

**F2.** Most of the fire engines and equipment in the county are old and becoming obsolete. There are no comprehensive plans or consistent budget allocations for replacement.

**Response: Partially Disagree**

**F3.** The Grand Jury identified an overall lack of evacuation preparedness in the county, especially relating to dissemination of information to the public.

**Response: Disagree**

**F4.** Tuolumne County, with its large animal population, is comparable to Butte County in

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its unpreparedness to mount an effective full-scale animal evacuation in the event of a widespread disaster.

**Response: Disagree**

**F5.** Tuolumne County officials have demonstrated indifference to the issues relating to large-scale animal rescue by not having an animal evacuation plan in place.

**Response: Disagree**

**F6.** During a widespread disaster small, local animal evacuation volunteer groups will be inadequate and often completely unavailable, as they struggle to deal with their own evacuation issues.

**Response: Disagree**

**F7.** Tuolumne County code regarding defensible space and fuel modification is not adequate to protect residents, property owners, and natural resources, because it does not address fuels on vacant property, or require fuel reduction along neighborhood roads to maintain a safe clearance.

**Response: Agree**

### **Grand Jury Recommendations**

**R1.** The Grand Jury recommends that all stakeholders, including the public, conduct a peer review of the recommendations on the state of Tuolumne County's fire departments with emphasis on cost and plausibility of implementation prior to deciding on recommendations made in the Matrix Report. It is essential that all communities be represented in any deliberation and decisions.

**Response:** The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors concurs that input by all stakeholders, including the community, is vital in examining the current structures in place in order to move to a different organizational structure and delivery of fire services in the county. It will take everyone putting aside the traditional way of doing business and looking at what is the best for all the County. This includes the location, staffing and resources at each station.

**R2.** The Grand Jury recommends that Tuolumne County create and implement an ongoing plan for replacement of aging fire engines and equipment, including a dedicated revenue source.

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**Response:** Staff developed a written fleet replacement plan in spring 2019 and information from that plan was presented to the Board of Supervisors and the public during mid-summer 2019. The plan was again updated in June 2020. Efforts are underway, and have been since mid-summer 2019, to secure additional revenue through a variety of methods. The Board placed a revenue measure on the March 2020 ballot for an increase in both sales tax and transient occupancy tax, which would have provided much needed revenues for essential services such as fire. Both measures failed. The Board has approved staff to begin working with other fire districts and community Service Districts to collaborate on a county wide fire parcel tax. This would require a special election and is subject to voter approval.

**R3.** The Grand Jury recommends that Tuolumne County create and implement a saturation of public service messages now, before there is an imminent threat to the community. The public needs to be made aware of evacuation plans. Public service announcements should direct the public to where the plans can be reviewed.

**Response:** Evacuations fall under the jurisdiction of the Sheriff. As such, he and his staff have authority over Everbridge, an emergency notification system, and have authority to launch messages directly through this software, which could include IPAWS (Integrated Public Alerting and Warning System through FEMA).

The Sheriff and the County Office of Emergency Services have worked together to provide various modes of communication related to fire safety preparedness. There are several web pages dedicated to this on the County OES website at: <https://www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov/1162/Wildfire-Preparedness>. On the left is a link for Community Maps with links to 23 different communities. The Sheriff's Office and OES have stressed, for years, that members of the community must be proactively engaged in their safety, when it comes to fire safety. They both stress the importance of knowing the area around an individual's home or rental. They need to know how to get to an arterial road as a fire can come from any or multiple directions.

Furthermore, there is a page for individuals to create their plan: <https://www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov/1163/Create-Your-Plan>. This page leads to the registration for Everbridge, Fire Safety Homeowner Checklist, Ready, Set, Go: Wildfire Action Plan, Defensible Space pamphlet, Are You Set? Emergency Kit and Go Early! Evacuation Guide. These pamphlets are available in paper format and have been provided during community outreach forums.

Further down on this same page there are resources for child evacuation preparedness and animal evacuation preparedness, two of which are the Tuolumne County Animal Control Small Animal Evacuation Preparedness and Tuolumne County Animal Control Livestock Evacuation Preparedness. On the left there are several other links to assist with evacuation preparedness.

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There were a series of community meetings held last year to engage the community in fire safety and preparedness. All of this information was made available electronically and in paper format. Due to the pandemic community outreach now takes place via social media, radio, and newspaper.

**R6.** The Grand Jury recommends that Tuolumne County enter a Memorandum of Understanding for animal evacuation with outside organizations such as Cowboy 911, or other non-profit groups with experienced personnel to provide training upon request. This should be done with the cooperation and participation of local animal control groups to avoid unnecessary conflicts and delays.

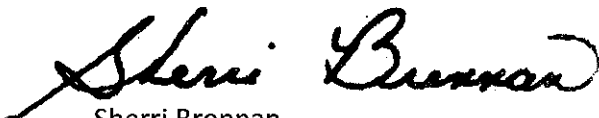
**Response:** Tuolumne County Animal Control already has partnerships with Animal Care Emergency Services (A.C.E.S.) and Evacuation of Livestock in Tuolumne Emergencies (Team Elite), as noted on page 7 of the Livestock Emergency Management Plan. A.C.E.S. sheltering component's goal is to assist in the care and shelter of animals displaced in a disaster and/or emergency. These volunteers are trained to assist Animal Control staff with the sheltering of domesticated animals (livestock only). They do not partake in any rescue, evacuation. Team Elite's goal is to assist in the evacuation of livestock that is affected by a disaster. Team Elite volunteers are trained to assist Animal Control staff with the evacuation of livestock either to the department's shelter locations(s) or to locations established between Memorandums of Understandings with landowners, with livestock facilities, if time and logistics permit.

**R7.** The Grand Jury recommends that Tuolumne County review and update current policy on Defensible Space and Fuels Management to ensure maximum protection of Tuolumne County citizens, animals, and natural resources.

**Response:** The State of California Public Resources Code 4291 provides specific guidelines for defensible space on improved parcels in the state responsibility areas (SRA). This has been adopted by the County of Tuolumne in ordinance and code. The County of Tuolumne staff are researching vacant lot ordinances.

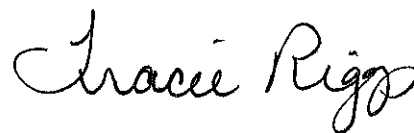
Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions regarding same.

Sincerely,



Sherri Brennan

Board Chair



Tracie Riggs

County Administrator