



REBOOTING ALAMEDA COUNTY EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

This document contains some recommendations for transforming emergency preparedness training for first responders within Alameda County per the March 27, 2018 resolution of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Oakland Privacy is a citizen's coalition that works regionally to defend the right to privacy, enhance public transparency and oversight regarding the use of surveillance techniques and equipment, and resist police militarization. We were instrumental in the creation of the first standing municipal citizens' privacy advisory commission in the City of Oakland, and we have engaged in privacy enhancing legislative efforts with the Counties of Alameda and Santa Clara and several Northern California cities and regional entities. As experts on municipal privacy reform, we have written use policies and impact reports for a variety of surveillance technologies, conducted research and investigations, and developed frameworks for the implementation of equipment with respect for civil rights, privacy protections and community control. Since our founding in 2013 our members have continuously engaged in the effort to redefine and redirect Alameda County's emergency preparedness training exercise.

Summary of Recommendations:

- **End The Vendor Expo**
- **End The Commercial Sponsorship of Emergency Drills**
- **Create Legitimate Violence Avoidance and De-Escalation Drills**
- **Design Exercises Featuring Regional Coordination**
- **Train Non-SWAT Police Officers in Non-SWAT Policing Techniques**
- **Focus on Law Enforcement Problems**
- **Open the Event Up Fully to the Press, And As Feasible, the Public**

Specifics:

- **End The Vendor Expo**

From the days of racist t-shirts and racks of assault weapons on display to the current day, the vendor exposition has been a constant source of consternation to the community. The selling of tactical gear is not fundamental to a training exercise and is a distraction from what should be the central focus: emergency preparedness and resilience after disaster strikes.

The gear on display is universally couched in militaristic terminology, drills are constructed to feature the technology of participating vendors rather than the needs of the participating regions, and despite the passage of attempted reforms, the exposition continues to feature surveillance technology, including facial recognition software, not in common law enforcement use.

Vendors selling such equipment continue to market it by referring to crowd control and protest monitoring. (A NetGear sales representative at the 2018 expo told a participating SWAT officer that their cameras could be hidden in trees to monitor protests and then said, within earshot of Alameda County employees, “there were certain people at the event you couldn’t talk about some stuff in front of,” indicating that reform principles were not taken seriously by some vendors, nor by some Alameda County employees.)

Raffles for gift certificates at gun dealers, while technically not a gun sale or transfer at the exposition facility, are also not in the spirit of the attempted reforms.

With regard to economic impact, the supervisors have the ability to re-allocate funds from the overall UASI grant of \$6 million dollars to cover the amount provided by booth fees or reduce the scale of the event proportionately.

- **End The Commercial Sponsorship of Emergency Drills**

When preparedness exercises are designed by equipment manufacturers to feature the use of their equipment, preparedness goals become distorted into marketing designated products. First responders should be put through exercises because those exercises provide needed practice for specific skill sets and specific situations that they are likely to encounter on the job.

The design of exercises should be delegated to experts in the field of emergency preparedness – with emphasis on natural disasters - including both practitioners and academics and drawing upon both the field of professional response and that of community resilience.

We encourage Alameda County to seek assistance from the academic community in putting together a design committee to develop and vet future drills, drawing from some but not all of what has previously been done and referencing best practices for community-oriented policing, SWAT, fire and emergency practices including the expertise contained in the CERT and CARD communities.

- **Create Legitimate Violence Avoidance and De-Escalation Drills**

It should be a given that in policing, fire and emergency preparedness an important aim is to minimize injury, casualties and the use of force. The desired goal in any dangerous situation is to stabilize it while avoiding loss of life and serious injury to anyone. What we sanction in publicly subsidized training should reflect our goals. If first responders practice avoiding the loss of life, then those are the skills they will take with them into our streets. We should model the skills that we want to build and cultivate in first response.

At least 75% of the preparedness drills should be designed to model situational stabilization without any fatalities or serious injuries. We have serious reservations about the contest aspect of the Urban Shield drills, but if the contest component is maintained in the future, scoring criteria should be adjusted to downgrade violent responses and reward the avoidance of the use of lethal force and successful de-escalation.

In order to facilitate this, the total number of drills should be reduced, the time allotted for each one should be increased, and the forced sleep deprivation of the exercise cycle should be reined in. The current marathon style training through dozens of charged situations maximizes adrenaline-fueled and reactive responses. We also encourage the use of trained individuals to portray the perpetrators of criminal acts rather than untrained volunteers playacting as terrorists in order to improve the quality of the exercises and avoid stereotypical caricatures of “terrorists” and “criminals”.

- **Design Exercises Featuring Regional Coordination**

In an actual emergency or disaster, it will be necessary for SWAT, fire, hazmat, medical teams and community responders to work together and coordinate their activities. If the intent of emergency preparedness is realistic training, then it makes little sense to segregate activities, thereby preventing what is probably one of the few available opportunities for integrated training.

Preparedness drills that feature imaginary summonses of hazmat or medical teams prevent first responders from practicing the balance of the full gamut of activities and services that will have to be going on at the same time during an actual crisis event. They also prevent trainees from experiencing the kinds of realistic scenarios where they might need or call for another regional team to meet a medical or fire or hazmat need, but due to the chaos a real disaster will engender, may not have the public safety response they need immediately. What then? These are the kinds of real world challenges we want to confront in emergency preparedness.

The artificial segregation of the different kinds of first responders from each other creates a surreal environment where shot victims don't need medical care immediately, bombs don't need to be detonated, and fires don't need to be put out. We suggest that there is a greater need for real-life practice at multimodal coordination than there is for elaborate mutilated corpse makeup when our intent is realistic training drills.

Some Alameda County staff have indicated that combined drills across public safety disciplines would be too complicated to coordinate. Beyond providing little confidence as to what might happen in a real emergency, we believe that is not the case. It is a disservice to those being trained to simply have them snap their fingers to summon medical after play-shooting someone or say "now hazmat" as poisonous mock chemicals seep across the floor.

- **Train Non-SWAT Police Officers in Non-SWAT Policing Techniques**

In a natural disaster or large-scale regional emergency, uniformed personnel will be called to duty whether they are affiliated with a local SWAT team or not. Urban Shield's restriction on policing training to only SWAT teams and personnel deprives other policing units from emergency preparedness training, although they will inevitably be participating when an actual emergency or disaster happens. It would seem to be in our interest for more officers to be able to access emergency preparedness training than just those who sign on for SWAT team duty.

Such a change would necessarily alter the focus of the policing training offered at an Alameda County training exercise away from the current emphasis on SWAT raid tactics, but we think that would improve the training. That's partially because the majority of police work does not consist of SWAT raids, and partially because SWAT raid tactics are not generally the desired response to a natural disaster, nor often to a mentally ill perpetrator, a medical situation, or other scenarios that can require emergency response. We would like to see Alameda's program encompass a wider range of policing training and skills than just SWAT teams practicing SWAT raids.

While hard statistics are difficult to come by, the current best estimates are that 80% of the 80,000 or so SWAT raids in the United States are carried out as drug search warrants on private homes, a scenario that has little to do with natural disasters. Practicing a broader spectrum of policing activities than just SWAT-style raids, with a broader range of personnel than local SWAT teams, could provide far more emergency preparedness bang for the buck.

- **Focus on Law Enforcement Problems**

A three day hiatus from regular duties to focus on training can be a real gift for uniformed personnel. In the case of policing, it potentially provides a genuine opportunity to take a breather and address some of the issues in policing. The time currently spent in a vendor expo could potentially be repurposed into quality training time dedicated to improving policing outcomes.

As a community, we would all like to see less deaths of unarmed people at the hands of police. We have seen more than a thousand of these tragic outcomes annually for several years in a row and the Bay Area has not been exempt. Additionally, whenever racial disparities in policing are studied, racial disparities in policing are found.

It should be a part of any multi-million dollar law enforcement training exercise to address these problems and attempt to provide practice and assistance in reducing these negative outcomes that have a deleterious effect on the safety of the community, whether during a natural disaster or emergency or every day on the street. We don't need to look any further than Hurricane Katrina for a real-life example of how bias can distort and damage emergency response and exacerbate injury and loss.

We recommend using the time currently dedicated to the vendor expo and certain seminars to incorporate expanded training on how to avoid practices that lead to the deaths of unarmed people merely holding pencils or cell phones in black hands and how to compensate for implicit racial bias and directly address explicit racial bias when it is encountered. However much of this kind of training currently exists, it has proven not to be a sufficient amount and more can be provided. There are many experts in the region who can assist.

As a leader in progressive social policy, Alameda County should make a point of taking action to improve our communities, and reduce terrorism of all kinds, including that sometimes experienced by our black and brown communities at the hands of law enforcement, as they have been telling you for many years. Such practice will make for a stronger emergency response function in the County, improved first-responder/community partnerships in our neighborhoods and would be an appropriate use of federal public safety dollars.

- **Open the Event Up Fully to the Press And The Public (As Feasible)**

The right of the people to understand how their tax dollars are being spent, and to have confidence that emergencies and natural disasters are being trained for effectively should not be infringed. Actively fostering community involvement in disaster preparedness has benefits for governmental and law enforcement entities. This is how a well balanced society works.”