

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

DRAFT

Report Title: Emergency Preparedness: The Role of Local Law Enforcement Agencies
Report Date: June 17, 2026
Response by: Rio Dell City Council, with the Chief of Police, Rio Dell Police Department, joining as invited respondent

FINDINGS

- We agree with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F3, F4, F8, F9.
- We disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F5 (partially disagree), F6 and F7 (partially agree).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered R2 have been implemented.
- Recommendations numbered R3 and R8 have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
- Recommendations numbered R7 and R9 require further analysis.
- Recommendations numbered: None will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

An explanation of each response is set out in the attached pages, as required by Penal Code section 933.05.

Date: October 20, 2026

Signed: _____

Debra L. Garnes, Mayor, City of Rio Dell

Number of pages attached: 7

Rio Dell City Hall
675 Wildwood Avenue
Rio Dell, CA 95562
(707) 764-3532
cityofriodell.ca.gov

DRAFT



TO: The Honorable Judge Timothy A. Canning
California Superior Court for Humboldt County
825 5th Street, Eureka, CA 95501

Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury
P.O. Box 657
Eureka, CA 95502

FROM: Rio Dell City Council
City of Rio Dell

RE: Emergency Preparedness: The Role of Local Law Enforcement Agencies
(Released June 17, 2026)

DATE: October 20, 2026

Dear Judge Canning and Members of the Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury:

The City of Rio Dell submits this response as the governing body required to respond under Penal Code section 933. The Chief of Police joins as an invited respondent on behalf of the Police Department.

Rio Dell is a close-knit, warm-hearted community, and it is served by the smallest police department among the cities reviewed in this report. That scale shapes much of this response to a practical consideration: our officers know the community well, but the Department has limited staff available for planning, documentation, and outside meetings beyond day-to-day operations. The City appreciates the Grand Jury's attention to this subject and agrees with much of the report. Before addressing the individual findings and recommendations, the City respectfully corrects one factual matter: Rio Dell has maintained an Emergency Operations Plan since 2003. That correction is discussed below and informs several of the responses that follow.

Rio Dell's Emergency Operations Plan

The report states that, of the five cities reviewed, "all are EOPs except Rio Dell," and describes the City's plan as an appendix to a city safety plan rather than a true EOP. This statement is inaccurate.

The City has maintained a stand-alone Emergency Operations Plan since December 2003. The plan is 259 pages and addresses the City's emergency management organization, department

roles including the Police Department's, response and recovery procedures, and coordination with county, state, and mutual aid partners. It was developed with the assistance of grant funding that is no longer available to the City.

The City acknowledges that the plan is dated and would benefit from updated formatting, terminology, and references. At the same time, Rio Dell's size, hazard profile, and department structure have not changed as significantly since 2003, which lessens the practical impact of the plan's age.

The City has a working draft of a shorter, modernized Emergency Operations Plan intended to replace the 2003 plan. Progress has been limited primarily by available staff time rather than a lack of commitment: the 2003 plan was completed with dedicated grant funding, and the current update is being carried out by existing staff alongside their regular duties. The City's timeline for completing this work is addressed under Recommendation R3, below.

FINDINGS

Finding F1

Grand Jury Finding: *“Local law enforcement agencies can provide input into the Humboldt County Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Emergency Operations Plan, but many do not participate. Non-inclusion in the plans may hinder coordination with other first responders during a disaster.”*

Response: Agree.

Status: Ongoing.

The City agrees that Rio Dell benefits when the Police Department's perspective is reflected in the County's emergency plans, and the Department intends to continue contributing that perspective going forward.

Finding F2

Grand Jury Finding: *“Local law enforcement agency representatives typically do not attend regular Office of Emergency Services meetings due to time constraints or higher priority obligations. Irregular participation in these meetings limits their ability to share their experience and may also lead to reduced coordination with other first responders during a disaster.”*

Response: Agree.

Status: Will continue to improve.

The City agrees, and notes that this reflects the Department's limited staffing more than a lack of interest in participating. With a small number of sworn officers covering patrol around the clock, sending a representative to a daytime county meeting often requires adjusting shift coverage. The Department is working to have a representative attend on a more consistent basis as staffing allows.

Finding F3

Grand Jury Finding: *“Local government representatives (such as city managers) who do attend the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services meetings may not provide input*

from a law enforcement perspective. This lack of input can result in the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services not being fully aware of the priorities and requirements of local law enforcement agencies as it updates the Hazard Mitigation and Emergency Operations Plans.”

Response: Agree.

Status: Ongoing.

The City agrees. City Administration represents the City at these meetings, but that representation is not a substitute for direct Police Department input on operational matters such as evacuation routes, staging areas, and mutual aid needs specific to Rio Dell.

Finding F4

Grand Jury Finding: *“The unique disaster response needs of local communities are known by experienced officers, but are not always articulated in local law enforcement agency disaster response documentation. As a result, new or less experienced officers may not have access to this information.”*

Response: Agree.

Status: Will continue to improve.

The City agrees. What is missing is more department-specific detail — particular routes, staging areas, and local knowledge that currently resides primarily with the Department's more experienced officers. The City intends to incorporate this detail into the Emergency Operations Plan update described above.

Finding F5

Grand Jury Finding: *“Incident Command System training is a core component of California and national emergency response protocols, but is typically received by law enforcement officers only when they are at the police academy. This knowledge degrades without refresher training.”*

Response: Partially Disagree.

Status: Ongoing.

The City partially disagrees. ICS knowledge may degrade without refresher training, but this is not universally true; Department officers apply ICS structure during actual incidents, not only at the academy, which helps keep the framework familiar for many of them. The City supports additional formal refresher training, but does not agree that Department officers are currently operating on stale training.

DRAFT

Finding F6

Grand Jury Finding: *“Scenario-based Incident Command System training is not regularly conducted due to staffing constraints and budgetary limitations. As a result, local law enforcement officers may not be adequately trained in their disaster-response roles.”*

Response: Partially Agree.

Status: Will continue to improve.

The City partially agrees. Given the Department's staffing level, taking officers off patrol for a multi-day scenario exercise carries a real operational cost, which has limited the frequency of this training. The City will continue to pursue regional exercises that allow training costs and staffing impacts to be shared among agencies. RDPD personnel currently receive formal ICS instruction, POST training, critical-incident training, and operational experience.

Finding F7

Grand Jury Finding: *“When held, scenario-based disaster response training typically focuses on agency coordination, mitigation, and planning, but often does not include the actual activities that need to be performed during a real event. As a result, law enforcement officers may not be adequately trained on the specific skills needed to respond to disasters in their communities.”*

Response: Partially Agree.

Status: Will continue to improve.

The City partially agrees. This finding is framed in qualified terms — training “often” lacks realism, so officers “may” be undertrained — and the City does not believe it accurately describes the Department's practice. Rio Dell's training exercises already incorporate field-level tasks alongside coordination and planning. The City supports continued improvement, but does not agree that current training leaves officers unprepared for the hands-on demands of a real event. RDPD personnel currently receive formal ICS instruction, POST training, critical-incident training, and operational experience.

Finding F8

Grand Jury Finding: *“Some specialized disaster response equipment is unavailable or not adequately maintained by local law enforcement agencies due to budgetary limitations. As a result, these agencies may be unable to respond effectively or efficiently to local disasters.”*

Response: Agree.

Status: Ongoing.

The City agrees. A department of Rio Dell's size cannot maintain every category of specialized equipment, and budget constraints are the primary reason. The Department relies on mutual aid to fill these gaps and will continue to pursue grant funding where available.

Finding F9

Grand Jury Finding: *“Availability of specialized disaster response equipment is less of an issue for the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office. This allows them to respond to local*

disasters more effectively themselves and to serve as a potential source of equipment for local agencies.”

Response: Agree.

Status: Ongoing.

The City agrees, and values its working relationship with the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office. The City and Department rely on this partnership and on regional mutual aid for equipment and capabilities that a department of Rio Dell's size cannot reasonably maintain on its own.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation R2

Grand Jury Recommendation: *“The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell direct their Police Chiefs to designate representatives to attend the regular meetings and provide input to the Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services by no later than December 31, 2026.”*

Response: Implemented.

Implementation Status: Implemented.

This recommendation has been implemented. The Chief of Police has designated a representative to attend Office of Emergency Services meetings when staffing allows. Given the Department's size, attendance may occasionally be affected by operational needs, but the designation itself is in place well ahead of the December 31, 2026 deadline.

Recommendation R3

Grand Jury Recommendation: *“The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell direct their Police Chiefs to ensure that a complete list of local disaster response needs, priorities, and protocols is included in their individual city disaster response documentation by no later than March 31, 2027.”*

Response: Not yet fully implemented; will be implemented.

Implementation Status: In progress; target completion March 31, 2027.

That work is already underway. The City has a working draft of a shorter, modernized Emergency Operations Plan, and the Chief of Police will ensure it includes a complete, department-specific list of local disaster response needs, priorities, and protocols before it is finalized. The City is targeting the Grand Jury's March 31, 2027 deadline and will pursue grant funding and/or expert assistance that could allow the work to be completed sooner.

Recommendation R7

Grand Jury Recommendation: *“The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell, after consultation with their respective police chiefs, add scenario-based ICS*

Field Response Training as a separate line item within the FY 2027-2028 local police department budget.”

Response: Requires further analysis.

Implementation Status: Future budget consideration.

The City supports scenario-based ICS Field Response Training. The City will weigh this option against grant funding and shared regional training opportunities. The City and Police Department will evaluate anticipated training needs, potential costs, regional training opportunities, available grant funding, and other relevant budget considerations. This analysis will be completed and presented for consideration through the City's budget and administrative review process no later than December 17, 2026.

Recommendation R8

Grand Jury Recommendation: *“The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell direct their Police Chiefs to add scenario-based ICS Field Response Training to their regular training schedule, by no later than July 1, 2028.”*

Response: Not yet fully implemented; will be implemented.

Implementation Status: In progress; target completion July 1, 2028.

The City agrees and will incorporate this training into the Department's regular training schedule as staffing and regional training partnerships allow, with a target completion date of July 1, 2028.

Recommendation R9

Grand Jury Recommendation: *“The city councils for Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and Rio Dell, after consultation with their respective police chiefs, add specialized disaster response equipment, maintenance, and training/certification as separate line items within the FY 2027-2028 local Police Department Budget.”*

Response: Requires further analysis.

Implementation Status: Future budget consideration.

As with Recommendation R7, the City already evaluates equipment needs during each budget cycle and pursues grant funding when available. Whether a separate budget line item is warranted, given the City's budget size and reliance on mutual aid, will be evaluated during the FY 2027-2028 budget process.

The City and Police Department will evaluate specialized disaster response equipment needs, associated maintenance and replacement costs, applicable training and certification requirements, available grant funding, and regional resource capabilities. This analysis will be completed and presented for consideration through the City's budget and administrative review process no later than December 17, 2026.

Conclusion

The City appreciates the Grand Jury's work on this report and agrees with the great majority of its findings and recommendations. The Grand Jury report describes the City's plan as an appendix to a city safety plan rather than a true EOP. The City has maintained an EOP since 2003; it is long due for modernization, and the City is completing that work as staff time allows.

As the smallest police department among the cities reviewed, Rio Dell faces real trade-offs in balancing emergency preparedness activities against day-to-day public safety responsibilities. The City has aimed to be candid, in this response, about where those constraints apply and where the City respectfully disagrees with the report's characterization of the Department. The City remains committed to continued improvement in emergency preparedness, consistent with the resources available to a city of Rio Dell's size and financial capacity.

City Council Approval

The foregoing response was approved and adopted by the Rio Dell City Council at a duly noticed public meeting held on October 20, 2026, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

Respectfully submitted,

Debra L. Garnes, Mayor, City of Rio Dell
On behalf of the Rio Dell City Council

cc: City Manager
City Attorney
Chief of Police

Attest: Jessica Hill, City Clerk

Chief of Police Concurrence (Invited Respondent)

I join in the foregoing response as the invited response of the Rio Dell Police Department Chief of Police.

Josh Phinney, Chief of Police
Rio Dell Police Department

Date: _____

///