



STAFF REPORT

City Council

Meeting Date:

2/10/2026

Staff Report Number:

26-019-CC

Study Session:

Emergency preparedness efforts update

Recommendation

Staff recommends the City Council receive an update on emergency preparedness activities.

Policy Issues

Since fiscal year 2023-24, the City Council has identified emergency and disaster preparedness as a top priority.

Menlo Park Municipal Code (MPMC) Chapter 2.44 (Emergency Services) establishes the City's authority to prepare for and coordinate emergency response activities to protect life and property, including coordination with public agencies and affected private organizations. .

The City maintains an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) that complies with the California Disaster Service Act (CDSA) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Established under Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5 (HSPD-5), NIMS provides a nationwide framework to ensure coordinated and effective emergency response and recovery across all levels of government.

Additionally, the City participates in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Local Hazard Mitigation Planning process through the San Mateo County Operational Area, maintaining eligibility for certain FEMA disaster assistance and mitigation grant programs.

Background

Every five years, the San Mateo County Operational Area, in coordination with the City, conducts a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP). The LHMP evaluates the City's vulnerability to natural and human-caused hazards and identifies mitigation strategies to reduce the potential for injury, property damage, and community disruption. The plan addresses a broad range of hazards, including flooding, drought, wildfire, landslides, severe weather, terrorism, cyber threats, pandemics, and the impacts of climate change on hazard severity and frequency.

The 2021 LHMP identified flooding, earthquakes, and climate change as the City's top three risk areas. While the threat of a major earthquake remains constant, Menlo Park has also experienced increased impacts from wildfires and severe weather events in recent years, resulting in poor air quality and instances of localized flooding.

The City is currently updating its Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) to ensure the City can respond to emergencies in a coordinated, lawful, and effective manner. The EOP establishes roles and responsibilities, outlines how the City activates and operates the Emergency Operations Center, and provides a framework for coordinating City departments and external partners during disasters. Maintaining an up-to-date EOP supports life safety, continuity of essential services, Disaster Service Worker activation, and compliance with state emergency management requirements, while positioning the City to qualify for state and federal disaster assistance and to recover more efficiently following an emergency. Staff plan to bring the updated EOP to City Council for approval by June 2026.

Under MPMC Chapter 2.44 (Emergency Services) of the municipal code, the City Council's role in disaster preparedness and response is to provide governance, policy direction, and legal authority. The City Council adopts and maintains emergency-related policies and plans and exercises legislative and emergency powers as required during a declared local emergency, including ratifying emergency proclamations and authorizing necessary actions to protect life and property. Operational control of emergency response activities is delegated to the city manager, acting as Director of Emergency Services, and the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), allowing the City Council to focus on policy oversight, continuity of government, and community representation. Attachment B provides an overview of roles among City Council, city manager, and the EOC during disaster, as well as an organizational chart for the EOC.

In May 2024, the City hired an emergency preparedness coordinator to strengthen the City's readiness, mitigation, and response capabilities.

Analysis

Over the past year, the City has made substantial progress in strengthening emergency preparedness across internal operations, regional coordination, and community outreach. These efforts directly advance the City Council's established priority to enhance emergency and disaster preparedness and reflect a comprehensive, citywide approach to readiness, response, and resilience. Through expanded staff training, strengthened EOC capabilities, sustained regional partnerships, and improved emergency communications, the City has focused on ensuring continuity of government, timely public warning, and effective incident management during emergencies. Collectively, these actions demonstrate a maturing emergency management program that integrates people, systems, and partnerships. Investments in emergency preparedness have increased the City's operational capacity to respond to a wide range of hazards, from earthquakes and wildfires to extreme weather events. Ongoing collaboration with regional agencies, community organizations, and residents further supports a resilient framework that positions the City to protect life, property, and essential services during both planned events and unexpected incidents.

Staff preparedness and training

The City continues to build internal preparedness by expanding staff training and reinforcing emergency communications capabilities. A total of 381 City employees (both full-time and part-time staff) were trained in their roles as Disaster Service Workers (DSW), and received a personal disaster preparedness kit, ensuring continuity of government operations during emergencies. In addition, 30 City staff leaders completed EOC operations training, increasing the City's capacity to manage incidents at the policy, coordination, and operational levels.

Staff also participated in multiple preparedness activities, including the statewide Great California ShakeOut earthquake exercise and a full evacuation exercise at the Belle Haven Community Campus, reinforcing emergency procedures and interdepartmental coordination.

To improve communications resilience during emergencies, Government Emergency Telecommunications System (GETS) and Wireless Priority Service (WPS) access – approved by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security – was activated for senior staff and the Menlo Park Police Department. The city also corrected SMCAAlert system issues, established call groups for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Police Department, and conducted internal testing to ensure rapid and reliable notification of response personnel when needed. The city also improved SMCAAlert capacity for alerts to the community. In partnership with San Mateo County Department of Emergency Management (DEM), the city created 44 custom alert templates for multiple hazards and protective actions. These templates are designed through evidence-based research to provide complete and actionable alert and warning to the public.

In addition, the City now has communications redundancy since acquiring two deployable “MiniNSD” Network System Deployable devices capable of creating a cellular and Wi-Fi hotspot to provide cellular backhaul and satellite based high-speed Internet. Each device can support over 60 devices in up to a 500-foot radius.

Emergency operations center readiness and enhancements

The City started monthly meetings of the newly formed Emergency Services Working Group to improve cross-departmental emergency planning and coordination. The City made continued investments in EOC readiness through infrastructure improvements, training, and exercises. Enhancements included improved Verizon cellular coverage within City Hall, repaired EOC phone systems, issuance of EOC identification badges for Menlo Park Fire Protection District (MPFPD) Chiefs, and identification of alternate coordination spaces in city hall.

The EOC supported coordination during excessive heat and flooding events and conducted an SMCAAlert system test. Training activities included a one-hour EOC tabletop exercise in 2024 with 21 participants and a three-hour EOC functional exercise in 2025 with 33 participants. The exercise scenario was a fast-moving wildfire that prompted the EOC to work through evacuation procedures. The exercise included participants from the MPFPD and San Mateo County DEM.

To improve consistency and effectiveness during incident response, the City developed hazard-specific Incident Response Guides, EOC position-specific Job Action Sheets, and dedicated response guides for severe weather and earthquake incidents. These documents are tools that staff can utilize to guide them through a response regardless of what role they are filling in the EOC.

The emergency preparedness coordinator also completed the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) Emergency Management Specialist certification, CalOES EOC Credentialing Program, and the FEMA Advanced Professional Series certification.

Regional coordination and interagency engagement

The City remained actively engaged in regional emergency preparedness and response efforts. Participation included virtual EOC drills with the San Mateo County DEM, Foothills Dam Emergency Action

Plan exercises, San Francisquito Creek multi-agency coordination exercises, Cal Water EOC exercises, Regional Operations Center exercises, and countywide tabletop exercises.

Staff participated in the Silicon Valley Homeland Security Working Group, the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Community Preparedness Working Group, and the San Mateo County Emergency Managers Association. The emergency preparedness coordinator also served as Chair of the Emergency Managers Association Technology Working Group and as a member of the Mass Care and Sheltering Working Group. Additional engagement included attendance at the State Resilience Summit and the San Francisco Fleet Week Senior Leaders Seminar, as well as participation in regional planning efforts for Super Bowl LX and the FIFA World Cup.

The emergency preparedness coordinator represented the City in professional and regional organizations, including the California Emergency Services Association, the San Mateo County Emergency Management Association (serving as Vice President), and Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD). Additionally, the coordinator staffed the City and County of San Francisco's EOC during the 2025 Pride Parade, and the City of Palo Alto's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during Superbowl LX, contributing to regional incident management capacity.

Community preparedness and outreach

The City continued to strengthen community resilience through sustained outreach, education, and partnerships. Ongoing coordination with the MPFPD Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program included the coordinator completing the CERT Academy and continued collaboration on neighborhood-level preparedness efforts. Planning efforts with the American Red Cross and Salvation Army advanced the City's mass care and sheltering capabilities.

Public outreach activities included a major revision of the City website section dedicated to emergency and disaster preparedness (Attachment A), regular emergency preparedness articles in the City Digest, a City Council proclamation recognizing September as National Preparedness Month, and presentations at three Belle Haven emergency preparedness workshops. The City also sponsored Ham Radio Field Day in June 2025 to promote redundant emergency communications and participated in MPCReady meetings, working with the organization's board on continued program development.

At the 2025 Public Works Open House, the City provided emergency preparedness training and distributed emergency gas shutoff wrenches to approximately 150 households. Staff also provided emergency preparedness and operational support to official City events, including the 4th of July celebration, and participated in community events, such as regional fire safety watch efforts. These combined community outreach efforts contributed to a 10% increase in resident registrations for SMC Alert, expanding the City's ability to communicate critical information during emergencies.

Conclusion

Through continued investment in staff training, community outreach, operational readiness, and regional collaboration, the City has significantly strengthened its emergency preparedness posture. These efforts position the City to more effectively respond to, manage, and recover from emergencies while continuing to advance resilience as a core organizational priority.

Impact on City Resources

There are no impacts on City resources from this report. Ongoing investments in emergency preparedness, such as acquiring new technology or supplies, may require future City Council consideration.

Environmental Review

This action is not a project within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §§15378 and 15061(b)(3) as it will not result in any direct or indirect physical change in the environment.

Public Notice

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Attachments

- A. Hyperlink – City of Menlo Park Emergency and disaster preparedness webpage:
www.menlopark.gov/prepared
- B. Roles in a disaster and EOC organizational chart

Report prepared by:
Brandon Bond, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator

Report reviewed by:
Stephen Stolte, Assistant City Manager

Table 1: Roles in a disaster		
City Council	City manager	Emergency Operations Center
Sets policy and provides governance	Leads the City's overall emergency response	Coordinates day-to-day emergency operations
Proclaims or ratifies a local emergency	Activates the EOC and emergency plans	Implements the city manager's direction
Adopts emergency ordinances or resolutions	Directs City departments and resources	Supports field responders and departments
Provides oversight and accountability	Serves as Director of Emergency Services	Tracks situation status and resource needs
Approves emergency spending and recovery actions	Communicates official direction to staff	Collects information and develops action plans
Reinforces official public messaging	Keeps the City Council informed	Manages logistics, planning, and documentation
Does not manage operations	Does not require Council approval for immediate life-safety actions	Does not set policy

Emergency Operations Center organization chart:

