

County Heat Emergency Response

Issue

How did the Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) respond to the July 2006 heat emergency?

Reason for Investigation

The extended heat wave in July 2006 prompted the Governor of the State of California to issue an emergency declaration that required state agencies to protect vulnerable residents. As a result of this declaration, all county welfare departments were directed to assess the safety of all In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) and Adult Protective Services (APS) recipients.

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury interviewed the following Sacramento County Officials:

- Division Manager, Senior and Adult Services (SAS)
- Program Managers, In-Home Supportive Services
- Manager, Quality Assurance and In-Home Supportive Services
- Administrative Services Officer III, SAS

The Grand Jury received and reviewed the following documents:

- All County Information Notice No. I-53-06 from the California Department of Social Services regarding the Governor's directive of July 26, 2006, requiring the assessment of safety of IHSS recipients and APS clients
- Press release from the Office of the Governor
- SAS notifications
- Sacramento County Safety Evaluation of IHSS recipients and APS clients as a result of prolonged high temperatures
- Emergency Operations Manual - Sacramento County Emergency Communication Manual; Department of Health and Human Services Emergency Operations Plan, June 7, 2004
- IHSS/County Medically Indigent Services Program (CMISP) User Manual
- Department of Health and Human Services – Senior and Adult Services – Volunteer/Staff Heat Emergency Contact Procedures, July 26, 2006
- Examples of calls to SAS during the heat crisis in July 2006
- Resource materials provided to the SAS staff and the community

- Memorandum from the Emergency Operations Office (EOO), Sheriff's Department, July 28, 2006
- Department of Health and Human Services - Senior and Adult Services Division Emergency Operation Review During the July 2006 Heat Wave
- Department of Health and Human Services - Senior and Adult Services letter dated July 31, 2006, "Sacramento County Safety Evaluation of In-Home Supportive Services and Adult Protective Services Clients as a Result of Prolonged High Temperatures Statewide"
- Welfare and Institutions Code sections 15750-15766
- Welfare and Institutions Code sections 12300-12317.2

Background and Facts

The county programs for IHSS and APS are under the direction of SAS. Both programs are state mandated and are involved with the protection of some of the most vulnerable people in the county.

IHSS serves aged, blind or disabled persons who are unable to remain safely in their homes without help. IHSS provides a range of services (Welf. & Inst. C. §12300) to qualified recipients. These services include assistance with daily tasks such as bathing, dressing, cooking, cleaning, grooming and feeding. A social worker evaluates each potential recipient and, in coordination with medical staff, determines the level of care required. The recipient must receive Supplemental Security Income or meet resource guidelines. That determination is made during the screening.

Once IHSS determines that the applicant is qualified, it can help the individual locate a caregiver for the necessary assistance. The recipient may have a family member or friend who can provide the services and that person can be designated as caregiver. If the recipient does not have someone to help out, IHSS will help find a suitable contractor. Caregivers are paid on an hourly basis, as certified by the recipient, for work performed. Funding for IHSS is provided by a combination of federal, state, and county funds.

For notification purposes, IHSS recipients, now numbering more than 18,000, are categorized by code to indicate their vulnerability and special impairments and supplies needed. The IHSS/CMISP User Manual, Section XI, IHSS Disaster Preparedness Assessment Plan, details the procedure for categorizing recipients. Under these guidelines a recipient may choose not to be notified in case of an emergency, and that is reflected in the assigned code. Those persons rated "critical" or "urgent" are contacted first in case of an emergency but those rated with a "decline notification" code could be overlooked even if their condition were critical or urgent. Each recipient is evaluated annually and re-categorized if necessary.

APS is a program intended to maintain the health and safety of elderly and adult victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or hazardous or unsafe conditions. An APS social worker investigates, usually within 24 hours, each allegation of abuse and takes action as necessary with paramedics, law enforcement or other agencies to mitigate and correct the situation. Most cases are closed within 30 to 60 days so the open cases are not extensive at any one time. Due to the sensitivity and

confidentiality of these cases, special care must be exercised with them. The Governor's declaration specified that each recipient contact be made only by an APS staff member.

The county is not dependent upon a declaration of emergency by the Governor to respond to an emergency, including a heat emergency.¹ IHSS and APS social workers, prior to the Governor's declaration, contacted known high risk recipients early in the heat wave and responded to incoming heat related calls by providing information and assistance when necessary. On July 25, 2006, the day before the Governor's declaration, the City of Sacramento opened "cooling centers" and swimming pools and issued a news release to inform the public of that fact. On that same day the IHSS Management Team told program supervisors to "have all social workers begin calling the most at-risk recipients on their caseloads to ensure that they were safe."

The Governor declared a heat wave emergency on July 26, 2006. Instructions from the Department of Social Services to the counties for compliance with the declaration were contained in a letter that directs in part: "The purpose of this All County Information Notice is to bring your attention to the Governor's Press Release issued July 26, 2006, requesting that all county welfare departments assess the safety of *all* In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) recipients and Adult Protective Services (APS) recipients as a result of the prolonged heat wave California is experiencing." (Emphasis added.)²

SAS then developed instructions and checklists specific to the heat problems and hired 20 temporary workers. Staff and the temporary workers used the checklists as a guide when they contacted recipients and clients to inquire about their safety and to provide advice about the services available. Because of the emergency declaration, police and sheriff personnel were asked to make on-site visits to residential hotels, mobile homes and other locations to evaluate conditions and offer help to vulnerable people. The high profile emphasis created by the Governor's declaration resulted in many agencies making contacts and they often overlapped. Some IHSS recipients and APS recipients reported that they were contacted by two or three agencies, but most were happy that they had been remembered.

According to internal call records from July 26 through July 28, 2006, IHSS staff and the temporary workers made 9,534 phone calls resulting in only 5,510 contacts out of the more than 18,000 IHSS total recipients. Those recipients indicating problems received an in-home visit or were referred to 911 as necessary. IHSS personnel also distributed fans and other supplies when needed. There were

¹ Under the California Emergency Services Act (Gov. C. §§8550-8668), a local emergency may be proclaimed by the governing body of a city or county, or by an official designated by ordinance adopted by the governing body. (Gov. C. §8630(a).) In Sacramento County, the designated official is the County Executive. (Sac. County Code of Ord. §2.46.010.) The term "emergency" for state and local purposes alike, includes . . . "conditions of disaster or of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property . . . caused by such conditions as air pollution, fire, flood, storm . . . or other conditions . . ." (Gov. C. §§8558 (b) and (c), respectively.) These provisions authorize the declaration of heat emergency by the Governor or, in the case of a local emergency, by the County Executive. The Natural Disaster Assistance Act (Gov. C. §§8680-8692), provides for state financial assistance to local agencies for repair, restoration, cost of personnel, equipment, supplies, materials, and other costs related to a local emergency. (Gov. C. §§8680.4, 8685, 8685.2.)

² Department of Social Services letter dated July 26, 2006, All County Information Notice No. I-53-06, Subject: Safety Evaluation of In-Home Supportive Services Recipients and Protective Services Clients as a Result of Prolonged High Temperatures Statewide.

191 in-home visits and seven 911 calls made as a result of this effort, and 32 fans were distributed. Calls made prior to July 26, 2006, were not recorded and are not part of the above figures.

It was reported by IHSS that it does not have an independent computer system for keeping track of recipients and must interface with a state data base called the Case Management and Payroll System (CMPS). This system is updated monthly and cannot be manipulated to provide real time information or categorized lists. When IHSS tried to use the printout from the system to develop call lists, the information was found to be outdated, erroneous, and contained the names of all recipients organized by area code. Staff had to use social worker notes to develop call lists and this caused some delay and confusion in getting the notification program operational. APS had similar, or more severe, problems with the computer output. SAS is working on the development and installation of a more flexible system called the Adult Data Automated Module (ADAM) that will enhance the capabilities of both agencies.

APS was able to contact 434 recipients and 15 people reported heat related problems. Two recipients died during the extended heat wave but it was unknown if the deaths were directly related to heat. One person, who was living with her son, and who was suffering from dementia, had turned on the heat instead of the air conditioner. The other person died while a case worker was on her way for a scheduled visit.

After the emergency, SAS directed a comprehensive review of the response to this event. A number of areas were identified that require corrective action including internal and external communication, data availability, cooperation with other agencies, lack of resources such as fans being immediately available for distribution and the absence of specific guidance in the County Disaster Plan detailing the parameters of heat and humidity necessary to require the implementation of emergency action. Information about developing a program to determine when heat becomes an emergency is available to SAS and it is used in other cities in the country. Many places use weather forecasts to predict and prepare for extreme heat. Had such guidance been identified, prominently outlined and understood by everyone involved in initiating emergency action, some discomfort could have been avoided. SAS staff is working on these problems either in-house or with the Sacramento County EOO.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1. The county could face emergencies from flood, terrorist attack, pandemic, earthquake or any number of unexpected events. After the Governor's declaration it took three days for IHSS to contact approximately 30 percent of its recipients. This result is unacceptable. IHSS has a staff of 150 and it reported that all people not on vacation were available to make calls during the emergency. Had only half of the available staff, or 75 people, along with the 20 temporary hires made just a modest ten calls per hour per person, it could potentially produce a combined total of 950 calls per hour.

Recommendation 1. SAS should work to enhance and streamline notification efforts in a way that fully utilizes all available resources to more quickly complete emergency notifications. Coordination with other county support agencies should be improved to eliminate duplication of effort and ensure

a more complete coverage of vulnerable people in the county.

Finding 2. DHHS and SAS conducted an Emergency Operation Review after the July 2006 heat wave and identified a number of areas, both in-house and involving coordination with outside agencies, that need improvement. Among other items they specifically addressed the need to operationally define what constitutes an extreme heat situation requiring emergency response.

Recommendation 2. DHHS, SAS and EOO should continue to work on the problems identified during the Emergency Operation Review to better prepare the county for disasters, including heat. A specific policy should be developed to establish a level of heat, humidity and length of exposure time considered to be a heat emergency in Sacramento.

Finding 3. SAS computers depend upon an interface with state computers and do not provide the flexibility and responsiveness required to handle an emergency.

Recommendation 3. SAS should expedite development of the planned ADAM computer system to provide real time recipient information for emergency notification. This information will be required to comply with the emergency plan currently being developed by EOO.

Finding 4. The current SAS policy for allowing individuals to elect not to be notified of an impending emergency does not demonstrate a realistic understanding of an emergency situation.

Recommendation 4. SAS should review the policy for assigning codes to determine if allowing IHSS recipients to decline emergency notification truly serves the best interests of the recipients and the community as a whole. Since the recipient is benefiting from services paid for by public funds, SAS should contact them in any case of an emergency.

Response Requirements

Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to both the findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Sacramento Superior Court by October 1, 2007, from:

- **Sacramento County Board of Supervisors**