

**SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT
PROCEDURE**

DATE: NOVEMBER 4, 2025

NUMBER: 8.20 – CRITICAL INCIDENTS

SUBJECT: EVACUATIONS

RELATED POLICY: N/A

ORIGINATING DIVISION: SPECIAL EVENTS & EMERGENCY PLANNING

NEW PROCEDURE: ☐

PROCEDURAL CHANGE: ☒ **EXTENSIVE CHANGES**

SUPERSEDES: DP 8.20 – 02/16/2024

I. PURPOSE

This Department procedure establishes guidelines for conducting evacuations during a disaster or critical incident.

II. SCOPE

This procedure applies to all members of the Department.

III. BACKGROUND

- A. In early 2019, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), and the San Diego County Fire Authority created a county-wide working group to standardize evacuation procedures throughout the region. The goal of the group was to create a unified county-wide approach to completing evacuations, as it is known that large-scale emergencies requiring evacuations regularly affect multiple jurisdictions. Multiple agencies in the county regularly work together in order to successfully complete large-scale evacuations. The working group standardized the protocol, as well as the training and forms to assist personnel in working together to safely and quickly conduct evacuations.
- B. When a critical incident occurs, it may become necessary to evacuate persons from the area. The decision to initiate an evacuation is made by the Incident Commander (IC) or the Unified Incident Command (UIC). The IC/ UIC will

determine whether an evacuation order or evacuation warning is most appropriate. Depending on the size and severity of the incident, as well as if the incident involves several agencies or various City disciplines, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and/or Department Operations Center (DOC) may be activated. The UIC will remain in control of the incident itself, whereas the EOC/DOC will handle the overall functions of the City and provide assistance to the UIC where needed. The UIC, DOC, and EOC all function independently under their assigned commanding officers.

- C. California Penal Code section 409.5(a) authorizes the Police Department to close an area during a disaster or other emergency. It is a misdemeanor for persons to willfully remain in the “closed” area after being told to evacuate or leave, (Cal. Pen. Code § 409.5(c)). However, [Annex C of the Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan](#) explains that Penal Code section 409.5 does not authorize forcible evacuations, specifically when referring to people already in a disaster area refusing to evacuate (such as a homeowner). **Law enforcement will not use force to remove any person who is already in the affected area and chooses to remain within the affected area when directed to evacuate.** This does not apply to a person who made entry into the closed area after the area was closed (such as someone who entered for other illegal purposes like looting).

IV. DEFINITIONS

UPDATED

- A. Alert San Diego – an alerting system which utilizes reverse 911, a cell phone application, and registered emails to provide alerts to affected community members regarding all-hazards incidents.
- B. Evacuation Order – Movement of community members out of an affected area due to an immediate threat to life and property from an emergency incident.
- C. Evacuation Shelter - a location, which provides basic life-sustaining services to a population affected by an emergency incident requiring evacuations. Shelters are generally pre-designated and determined by the American Red Cross (ARC). In the event that the ARC is unable to respond, the City of San Diego Park & Recreation Department is the City’s designated shelter provider.
- D. Evacuation Warning – Alerting of community members in a defined area of a potential threat to life and property from an emergency incident, which may require evacuations. Evacuations may be ordered as a result of the threat and community members should be prepared to leave.

NEW

- E. Genasys EVAC – An all-hazards evacuation management software tool, which allows public safety personnel to manage the evacuation status of zones, as well as other important points on a shared map and issue communications to the public via the Protect application.

NEW

- F. Genasys Protect – The public facing application and website that allows the public to quickly and efficiently receive near live updates on an all-hazards incident directly from the public safety personnel using Genasys EVAC to manage the event.
- G. Hard Closure – The area is closed to all except fire personnel, law enforcement personnel, and media.
- H. Hi/Low Audible Warning (HLAW) – A non-siren sound alternating between a fixed high and a fixed low frequency. The Hi/Low Audible Warning sound, referred to as HLAW, shall only be used to notify the public of an immediate evacuation order during an emergency.
- I. Resident Only Closure – A soft closure with the additional allowance of residents and local government agencies assisting with response and recovery.
- J. Shelter in Place – Directing community members to stay secure inside their current location due to an emergency incident with a threat to life and property. This may be used if evacuations will cause a higher potential for loss of life.
- K. Soft Closure – The area is closed to all except fire personnel, law enforcement personnel, media and other critical incident resources (e.g. utility companies, Cal Trans, City Department of Public Works).
- L. Temporary Evacuation Point (TEP) - a safe location and initial rally point to which evacuees are sent until an Evacuation Shelter can be established (e.g. parking lot or park).
- M. Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) – An alerting system, which alerts cell phones in range of cell towers within the specified alerting area.

V. **PROCEDURES FOR COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION**

UPDATED

Whenever Communications Division is directed to issue an evacuation order, evacuation warning, or shelter in place they will immediately facilitate any public notifications, as well as notify the Emergency Planning and Media Services Unit through the Watch Commander's Office. Whenever an evacuation order is issued, the Communications Division will alert the American Red Cross 24/7 Dispatch number at 855-891-7325, unless otherwise directed by the IC/UIC. Communications will advise the American Red Cross, Emergency Planning, and Media Services of the following information:

- A. Location of the incident/type of area (business/residential);
- B. Estimated number of evacuees or homes affected;

- C. Where evacuees are currently being directed;
- D. Any areas to avoid; and,
- E. Location of the Incident Command Post.

VI. EVACUATION FIELD PROCEDURES

- A. The first responding SDPD personnel will meet with the responding fire personnel and determine if the event will require a UIC or if a single IC with agency representatives would be most appropriate. For large-scale events, such as an emergency requiring large scale evacuations, a UIC should be established (e.g. wildland fire). A single IC with agency representatives is more appropriate for small-scale events (e.g. a single house fire with limited evacuations).
- B. Incident Commander (IC) / Unified Incident Command (UIC) Responsibilities
 - 1. The IC / UIC will determine if an evacuation order, warning, or shelter in place is required and the boundaries for those prospective orders or warnings. If any is required, and the IC is not a law enforcement official, the SDPD agency representative will work directly with the IC to assist in facilitating the evacuations. When deciding whether an evacuation order, warning, or shelter in place is necessary, the following should be considered:
 - a. Does the situation present such an overwhelming safety risk to:
 - (1) Persons in the impacted area who would certainly suffer injury or death by remaining, and/or
 - (2) Public safety personnel who may have to conduct rescues at a later time.
 - b. Will persons failing to leave interfere with or delay public safety personnel in performing their duties?
 - c. Evacuation orders should be issued when there is a clear and immediate threat to the health and safety of the population, and it is determined that evacuation is the best option for protection.

Evacuation orders should be described as mandatory to promote public cooperation.

2. Once the appropriate orders and warnings have been determined, the UIC will work to facilitate those evacuations by completing the following tasks. Public information dissemination, transportation, sheltering resources, security, and the protection of private property are important considerations to plan for when conducting an evacuation. The listed Evacuation Plan should be completed to assist in facilitating this process.

a. Determine an appropriate TEP. Personnel should be assigned to staff the TEP to provide direction to affected community members as well as collect information on evacuees.

UPDATED

b. Determine what public notification methods will be used to communicate the alerts to the public. Communications shall be advised of the area to be alerted using the Genasys Evac Zones to begin the appropriate messaging to the affected community (e.g. WEA and AlertSanDiego). Although the Genasys EVAC system and Zones are generally the quickest, most efficient, way to determine evacuation boundaries, there are times when it may not be the most appropriate. The decision to utilize another method is at the discretion of the UIC.

NEW

(1) Field Supervisors and command personnel working at the ICP, when the ability exists, will generally have the responsibility to make the appropriate zone status changes in the EVAC system. Once the changes are made, they will call the Dispatch Desk, and notify the on-duty Dispatch Supervisor of the changes and provide further direction on other notification methods to be utilized (i.e. WEA & Reverse911). The Dispatch Supervisor will review the changes in EVAC, publish the changes to the community by making them “community visible, and carry out the other notification methods as requested. Emergency Planning personnel and Media Relations personnel also have the ability to publish to the public as a backup to Dispatch.

c. Assign personnel to carry out the determined evacuations and close off the affected area.

d. Consideration should be given to providing additional needed assistance to community members with disabilities or other access and functional needs.

UPDATED

- e. Contact the American Red Cross 24/7 Dispatch Center at (833) 583-3111 (or City Parks & Recreation if ARC is unavailable) to advise them of the evacuations, potential number of evacuees, and current TEP location. The City of San Diego's Office of Emergency Services can also be contacted to assist the IC/UIC as a liaison to the shelter providers. They can be reached on their 24/7 duty cell phone: 619-736-1647.
- f. In the event that large animal evacuations are necessary, the San Diego Humane Society should be contacted to assist in facilitating this need. Both the Humane Society and San Diego County Animal Services keep lists of vetted community members.

C. Public Notification Methods

UPDATED

Notifications may be made using one or more of the following methods (it is highly recommended to utilize multiple methods to alert the public of an evacuation to maximize the chances of everyone receiving the info in a timely manner). When feasible, notifications should clearly inform people that failure to evacuate may result in serious physical injury or death, and that future opportunities to evacuate may not exist. Notifications should inform the public of what agency is issuing the alert, what and where the emergency is, guidance on what to do and where to go, as well as where they can receive additional information. If it is determined that an incident is severe enough to warrant issuing a WEA and reverse 911, Genasys EVAC shall be updated with pertinent information and made "Community Visible" (published to the public). However, there may be times in which less severe incidents, or incidents affecting a very small geographical area, might warrant utilizing the Evac system without the need to initiate a WEA and Reverse 911:

1. Door-to-Door - this method involves officers and other public safety personnel going door-to-door notifying occupants to evacuate. This is among the slowest methods of notification but is also the most effective in determining the exact area covered and the response of the persons notified. During incidents in which critical infrastructure (e.g. cell towers) have been damaged, this may be the most effective method of reaching the affected community. During Door-to Door evacuations, personnel may encounter citizens, such as homeowners, who refuse to leave. In this case they should advise the citizen that there may not be another opportunity to evacuate and that rescue services may not be available. Personnel should document the locations, names, and contact information of anyone refusing to leave and report that to the IC/ UIC.
2. Emergency Alert System (EAS) - this system was formerly called the "Emergency Broadcast System" (EBS). This system utilizes voluntary broadcasts of your evacuation message/information by the media. The

County coordinates the EAS. To access the EAS, contact the County Office of Emergency Services at their 24/7 duty number 858-688-9970 or via the Sheriff's Dispatch Center if phones are not operational.

3. Mass Notification Systems – Any mass notification message initiated by San Diego Police Department should be sent through the SDPD Communication Center by calling the dispatch desk. Radio transmission may be used in the event phone coverage is not available. As a backup, San Diego County Sheriff's Department Communications Center, as well as the County Office of Emergency Services, can also send out the notifications. It is highly recommended that Alert San Diego and Wireless Emergency Alerts be used in conjunction with each other.

UPDATED

- a. Alert San Diego notification system - Alert San Diego allows the City to send telephone notifications to residents and businesses within an area impacted or threatened by an emergency. The system utilizes 9-1-1 telephone databases, as well as their own database of registered numbers and emails. It is able to contact listed and unlisted land-line telephones, as well as registered cell phones and emails. If a call is sent to voice mail, the system will leave a voice message. If the telephone called is busy or does not answer, the system will redial that number up to three times in an attempt to deliver the message. Alert San Diego is TTY/TDD capable. Alert San Diego also employs the use of a cell phone application with push notifications, as well as their website.

UPDATED

- b. Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) – A short emergency message sent to cell phones in range of cell towers within the alerting area. These messages come through on cell phones similar to an emergency weather alert or an Amber Alert. Message characters are limited and should provide the following information; source of the message, what the threat is, basic location of the threat, guidance, direct to alertsd.org or include the Genasys Protect incident specific hyperlink for further details. An example of this is, "SDPD: WILDFIRE – SCRIPPS RANCH – EVACUATE S/W ON POMERADO RD – MORE @ ALERTSD.ORG" When a WEA is issued it can remain active in the system for up to 24 hours. The IC/UIC should continually evaluate the necessity of the WEA and when deemed appropriate may cancel an active WEA before the 24 hours by contacting the Dispatch Desk and having them cancel the notification.

Please see Section VIII, below for the WEA request form.

NEW

- c. Genasys EVAC & Protect – An internet-based software application that allows public safety officials to communicate directly to the

public regarding all-hazard emergencies. EVAC is the first responder platform and Protect is the public facing platform. Information published to the community in EVAC will be visible to the public on Protect. The community can view the map and information either by website or be downloading the free cellphone application for Android or IOS. EVAC can provide a direct hyperlink that can be included in other messaging (such as WEA), when a citizen clicks on the link, it will take them to the Protect website and show them affected zones. The cellphone application can provide the user with push notifications for the zones in their general vicinity or zones that they have set the application to monitor. This system can provide the public with a plethora of near live information such as detailed maps of affected zones, locations of TEPs and Shelters, as well as traffic control points. Providing them this level of information can assist in an efficient response and limiting the call volume into Dispatch. The person making changes in EVAC must notify Dispatch and provide them further direction on making those changes “community visible” as well as completing any other emergency messaging (i.e. WEA or Reverse911).

4. Public Address (PA) Systems – Officers can utilize the PA systems in their vehicles to notify members of the public of an evacuation. This method can reach wide areas with minimal personnel. However, the degree of compliance may not be readily apparent. In areas of high-rise buildings, the PA system may not reach all occupants and the message may become distorted due to “bouncing off” buildings.
5. SigAlerts - SigAlerts can also be utilized to inform citizens and the media of emergency conditions such as fires and flooding. Please refer to Department Procedure 2.07 for further details.
6. Social Media – The SDPD’s Public Information Officers (PIO) in the Media Services Unit have direct access to update the Department’s social media accounts. Information on critical incidents, evacuations, closures, shelters, etc. can be provided to them for posting on the Department’s social media accounts.
7. Telephones - this method is useful for reaching high-density population institutions (e.g., Zoo, schools, major businesses). However, determining which numbers to call and having sufficient staff to make calls will impact how quickly contacts are made.
8. High/Low Audible Warning (HLAW) – this system is part of the siren/emergency light control panel in patrol vehicles. The system may be used to alert specific communities during emergency evacuation orders

per 27002 CVC. The HLAW is an indicator to people in a specific area that they are in imminent danger and should evacuate immediately. Indiscriminate use of the HLAW may reduce the public's awareness of the identifiable sound and its purpose. Use for any purpose, other than the prescribed evacuation orders, is strictly prohibited. Cal. Veh. Code § 27002(c). While using HLAW, emergency lights should be activated to assist in the warning of danger.

- a. The San Diego Police Department currently has two versions of the HLAW system operational in the field.
- b. Vehicles containing the older "Smart-Controller" lights and siren control system utilize a repeating hi/low sound with no messaging.
- c. Vehicles containing the newer "Pathfinder" lights and siren control system utilize a repeating hi/low sound with intermittent messaging, which states, "This is the San Diego Police Department. This area is under evacuation order. Please evacuate immediately. Failure to evacuate could result in a loss of life," in both English and Spanish.
- d. **The HLAW shall not be used while driving Code-3 (per 27002 CVC) as it is not legally considered a siren.** All traffic laws must be obeyed while using the HLAW. If a Code-3 response becomes necessary, use of the HLAW shall be discontinued, wail or yelp are the only approved Code-3 sirens.

D. Security at Evacuation Shelters

1. Security at evacuation shelters will be at the discretion of the UIC. The UIC (or their designee) should work with the shelter provider to determine the appropriate course of action and needs of that shelter. The decision of what type of security to provide can be reevaluated as the incident expands or downsizes. Personnel may consider, but are not limited to, the following factors when making this determination;
 - a. Type of incident / emergency
 - b. Size of the shelter
 - c. Number of evacuees receiving services at the shelter
 - d. Type of equipment being utilized at the shelter
 - e. Type of building / location the shelter is being housed in

2. The following types of security, or combination of, may be provided:
 - a. Full time law enforcement personnel on site
 - b. Directed patrols
 - c. On a “call for service” basis
3. In the unusual event that an emergency shelter for a City of San Diego incident is placed in another jurisdiction, it is still the responsibility of the San Diego Police Department to provide for the security of that shelter when required.

E. Criminal Activity in Evacuated Areas

1. Providing security for an evacuated area will be at the discretion of the IC/UIC. The decision to provide security to an affected area can be reevaluated and adjusted as the incident expands or downsizes.
2. Penal Code section 463 says a person is guilty of looting during an emergency if he or she also engages in any of the following criminal activities:
 - a. Burglary (PC 459);
 - b. Grand Theft (PC 487);
 - c. Petty Theft (PC 488).
3. Note: PC 463 does not require that persons be arrested within an evacuated area; the only requirement is that the criminal conduct occurred during and within an affected area, as defined in Penal Code section 463(d).
4. Both Penal Code section 463 and the underlying criminal offense should be charged.

F. Media Access to Disaster Areas

1. California Penal Code section 409.5 authorizes the Police Department to prevent the public from entering closed disaster areas.
2. Section 409.5(d) says that duly authorized members of the media are not prevented from entering closed disaster areas.

3. Media members may be charged with Penal Code section 148(a)(1) if they interfere with, or delay, emergency services, or if the area they enter is considered an active crime scene.
4. The media may enter only those areas where the public would generally have free access (e.g., driveway, walkway to front door, etc.). The media may not enter areas of private property that would not generally be open to the public, such as enclosed yards or areas posted as “No Trespassing.”
5. With the emergence of non-traditional media outlets/providers (Social Media based news sources, etc.) the ability for officers to discern who is serving as a “duly authorized” member of the media will become increasingly difficult to verify.
 - a. When a person represents themselves as a member of the media and requests access to a closed disaster area, the below listed steps should be attempted, in order to both preemptively challenge their assertion and to maintain an accurate accounting of who entered the area. The latter being requested in order to aid in rescue efforts, should that need arise.
 - b. Officers should:
 - (1) Request the name of the news agency they represent;
 - (2) Request to see identification of the same, or;
 - (3) Valid government identification;
 - (4) Note vehicle description;
 - (5) Record this information by broadcasting it to the command post, and/or;
 - (6) Note the information via MPS or I/Net Viewer.
 - c. It is important to note, that the person requesting access is not legally obligated to provide any of this information. However, officers should do their best to consensually obtain it, by explaining that the main goal is accounting for those inside the disaster area. If the person maintains their standing as a member of the media, but declines to provide any information they should still be allowed access inside, unless they are a minor.

VII. RE-ENTRY/ REPOPULATION PROTOCOL

A. Re-entry or repopulation commences after a disaster has passed and officials deem it safe for residents to return to their impacted communities. This protocol is established to provide uniform guidance and procedures to ensure a coordinated, safe, and orderly repopulation into impacted communities. Communication between emergency personnel and the community is essential to ensure public health and safety when determining whether an area is safe to re-enter. The Repopulation Plan should be completed to assist in facilitating this process. See Section XIII, below.

B. Incident Commander (IC) / Unified Incident Command (UIC) Responsibilities

The UIC has the overall responsibility for repopulation of an impacted community. All Unified Incident Commanders should be part of the decision to begin the repopulation process, in consultation with appropriate agency representatives in order to assure the affected area is safe to re-enter.

C. Planning for and executing repopulation

1. Planning for repopulation is a complex process and, therefore, should begin early in the event. In order to facilitate this in major emergencies, it may be necessary for the UIC to create a specific ICS (Incident Command System) role (e.g. a repopulation branch) just to handle this responsibility. It is critical that all agencies involved in the incident communicate and work together on this process in order to facilitate a safe and smooth repopulation process.
2. The following should be considered and regularly reevaluated when planning for and executing repopulation: This list is not all encompassing, and discretion is given to the UIC to provide the appropriate resources for the needs of the event.
 - a. Surveys of the damaged area should be conducted to properly evaluate the community's safety.
 - b. It may be necessary to provide a specific check-in location outside of the affected area to which people requesting re-entry to the affected area report.
 - c. Initial repopulation should be limited to those requiring entry into the area (e.g. residents, business owners, and critical support groups such as healthcare, mental health personnel, contractors, and insurance adjusters). It may be necessary to properly verify identities of members entering the affected area and / or issue permits for people to enter the area.

- d. The need to provide escorts for people being allowed into the affected area.
- e. The need to provide additional assistance to community members with disabilities or other access or functional needs.
- f. Best / most appropriate / safest routes for people repopulating as well as appropriate road closures.
- g. The need to continue to provide an inner perimeter, an outer perimeter, traffic posts, and security check points.
- h. The need to allocate resources to the affected community to enhance public safety.

NEW

- 3. When a plan is in place and the order has been given to proceed with repopulation, EVAC shall be updated with the appropriate information. The status of the zones ready for repopulation should be changed to “Evacuation Order Lifted” and specific instructions should be included. All efforts to repopulate should be coordinated with Media Relations to provide the public with the pertinent information in as many ways as possible.

NEW

- 4. Once the incident has been completed in its entirety the Incident Command will need to determine when it is appropriate to reset the affected zones in Genasys to “normal” status. It is recommended that for most incidents, the status can be reset to “normal” 24 hours after the full completion of the event. However, for more complex events, it may be necessary to wait longer, this is at the discretion of the Incident Command.

VIII. FORMS

All forms referenced can be found in printable versions on the Resource Library under “Emergency Evacuation Plans” > “Emergency Evacuation and Repopulation.” It is recommended that field supervisors keep printed copies with them while on patrol.

- A. County-Wide Evacuation Checklist
- B. Wireless Emergency Alert Request Form
- C. Evacuation Plan
- D. Repopulation Plan