



THE THOMAS FIRE RECOVERY

After-Action Review

DECEMBER 2018



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Recovery Program Structure.....	4
Thomas Fire Timeline	4–10
County of Ventura Thomas Fire Recovery Team	6
After-Action Review Analysis	11
Improvement Plan Performance Matrix.....	23
Glossary of Terms	28
Participating Agencies	29



Executive Summary

The County Thomas Fire Recovery Program, together with the Unified City/County Recovery Program, accomplished much for our residents both during and in the months following the fire. While such accomplishments have been appropriately acknowledged, it is equally important that a thorough review of the Program's strengths and opportunities for improvement be conducted to improve the County's recovery efforts in the future. This is accomplished by the Thomas Fire Recovery After-Action Review (AAR) and this report. The Thomas Fire After-Action Review focused on the recovery activities initiated by the Ventura County Recovery Coordination Group. Where appropriate, observations and recommendations concerning activities initiated by the broader Unified Recovery Coordination Group (which included representatives from the Cities of Ventura, Ojai and Santa Paula) were reviewed.

The Thomas Fire Recovery AAR process was initiated in its informal capacity at the early stages of the Thomas Fire incident. These initial reviews took place informally during the regular meetings of both the Unified City/County and the County's internal Thomas Fire Recovery Teams. These improvements identified during the regular meetings were captured within the notes and catalogued for inclusion in the Recovery AAR.

The formal Recovery AAR was initiated in August of 2018 with the goal of identifying strengths and areas for improvement observed during recovery activities. This process included representation from 7 County agencies, the Unified Recovery Coordination Group, and the Thomas Fire Long Term Recovery Group, a gathering of community-based non-profit organizations also involved in the Thomas Fire recovery effort.

The strengths and areas for improvement identified in this report address the ability of the County to facilitate recovery activities after a disaster and are not specific to any one organization. All stakeholders share the responsibility to reinforce standards and implement solutions.

The improvement plan serves as a framework to enhance the outcome of disaster recovery efforts and to serve as a guide for future funding decisions. Although this process focuses on the Thomas Fire, it is designed to strengthen the County's capacity to effectively recover and rebuild in a coordinated fashion after any catastrophic incident.

The Recovery After-Action Review Report focuses on the following key areas:

- *General Program, including Local Assistance Center*
- *Debris Management and Reconstruction Support*
- *Human Services and Housing*
- *Healthcare*
- *Watershed Debris Flows/Landslides*
- *Finance*
- *Public Information*



SUMMARY OF RECOVERY PROGRAM STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENTS

There were a significant number of strengths identified within the recovery activities, many of which received recognition from State and Federal recovery partners as being groundbreaking, innovative and propelling forward recovery efforts. Among others, these strengths include:

- Strong coordination between County and City governments leading to the rapid implementation of County and Unified County-City Recovery Programs providing cross-jurisdictional recovery services, information and an organized, unified recovery effort.
- Swift opening of Local Assistance Center (LAC) to provide victims with access to local, state and federal support agencies and resources.
- Active participation and support by the County Board of Supervisors, including individual representation at numerous Town Halls and informational events.
- Rapid declaration of Local Health Emergency which facilitated expedited deployment of State teams to begin toxic waste removal.
- Expedited creation of the VenturaCountyRecovers website to provide the public detailed recovery related information in both English and Spanish and support more than five dozen email informational notices to website registrants.
- Extensive series of Town Hall information and education meetings beginning within the first week of the fire's start provided in multiple locations (Ventura, Ojai, Santa Paula and Fillmore) and encompassing multiple topics including Fire Status, Health, Debris Removal, Housing, and other recovery aspects.
- Provision of translation services (Spanish and Sign Language) at all Town Hall, informational and educational events.
- Establishment of a Local County Housing and Rental Assistance Program to provide \$500,000 in monetary assistance to fire victims in advance of subsequently approved federal aid (understood to be the first time a County or City has established such a program).
- Use of existing Home Share Program to house fire victims.
- Coordinated prioritization, marketing and management of the State CalRecycle Debris Removal Program by the County, the City of Ventura and CalOES to clear 672 residences of debris.
- Distribution of more than 750,000 protective breathing masks to the public.
- Rapid deployment of Behavioral Health Services to fire victims.
- Significant outreach of the CA HOPE Program/Team to support the ongoing Behavioral Health needs of residents through the recovery process.
- First of multiple permit fee waivers and ordinance changes to support rebuilding approved by the Board of Supervisors within 1 month of the fire's start.
- Use of a sophisticated Flood Warning System and instrumentation to accurately assess/forecast fire related debris flows threat.
- County Assessor, Auditor Controller and Tax Collector completion of majority of Calamity Claims Adjustments to damaged/destroyed Property Assessments within 4 months (statutorily allowed up to 12 months).
- County Clerk and Recorder Office provided next day service for lost Vital and Property Records at no cost to disaster survivors.
- Creation of an Expedited Building Permit review process focused on reviewing building permit applications for structures damaged or destroyed in the fire within two-weeks of receipt of application.

Also identified within the review process were opportunities for improvement that would strengthen the County's recovery activities and provide a more seamless recovery experience for Ventura County residents during future disasters. Among others, such opportunities for improvement include:

- Advanced planning and training for Recovery Program
- Early, comprehensive and sharable victim case management information
- Personal versus automated translation of all materials (websites, emails, press releases, etc.) to Spanish and simultaneous release of materials in multiple languages
- County process for handling of firearms and ammunition discovered during debris removal operations
- Handling and disposal of destroyed vehicles and appliances
- Future planning for temporary debris disposal sites
- Consistency in property damage assessment plans, protocols and information dissemination to the public
- Formal Disaster and Recovery cost-sharing agreement between the County and all 10 cities
- Knowledge and navigation of the Federal Public Assistance Program reimbursement process
- Donation management (financial and in-kind)
- Local Assistance Center appointment scheduling process

The areas for improvement identified in this report affect the ability of the County to facilitate recovery activities after a disaster and are not specific to any one organization. Although certain improvement initiatives may have a primary entity identified as responsible for its completion, cataloguing and implementing solutions to ensure strengths are repeatable and areas for improvement are remedied will in many cases require the active involvement and support of a wide range of Recovery stakeholders. The resulting improvement plan serves as a roadmap to enhance the outcome of disaster recovery efforts and potentially guide funding decisions. While this process is focused on the events surrounding the recovery efforts after the beginning of the Thomas Fire, it is designed to strengthen the County's capacity to effectively recover and rebuild in a coordinated fashion in response to any catastrophic disaster or incident.



Recovery Program Structure

Early conversations with CalOES and FEMA were the trigger for the County's engagement with recovery activities. The official establishment of the Ventura County Recovery Coordination Group occurred on fire Day two, when the County Executive Officer (CEO), following executive level meetings with FEMA, CalOES, the County Fire Chief and the County Sheriff, established the framework for the County's recovery program, determined its initial objectives, and appointed the County's Assistant CEO as the County's Recovery Program Director. The formal framework for the Recovery Coordination Group was comprised of six Recovery Task Forces headed by agency directors and senior-level managers and supported by two employees from the County Executive Office. In order to facilitate cooperation and coordination with city governments also overseeing recovery activities, the County also invited the Cities of Ventura, Ojai, Santa Paula and Fillmore to assign representatives to jointly serve as the Unified Recovery Coordination Group and encouraged the cities to implement their own complementary recovery structures.

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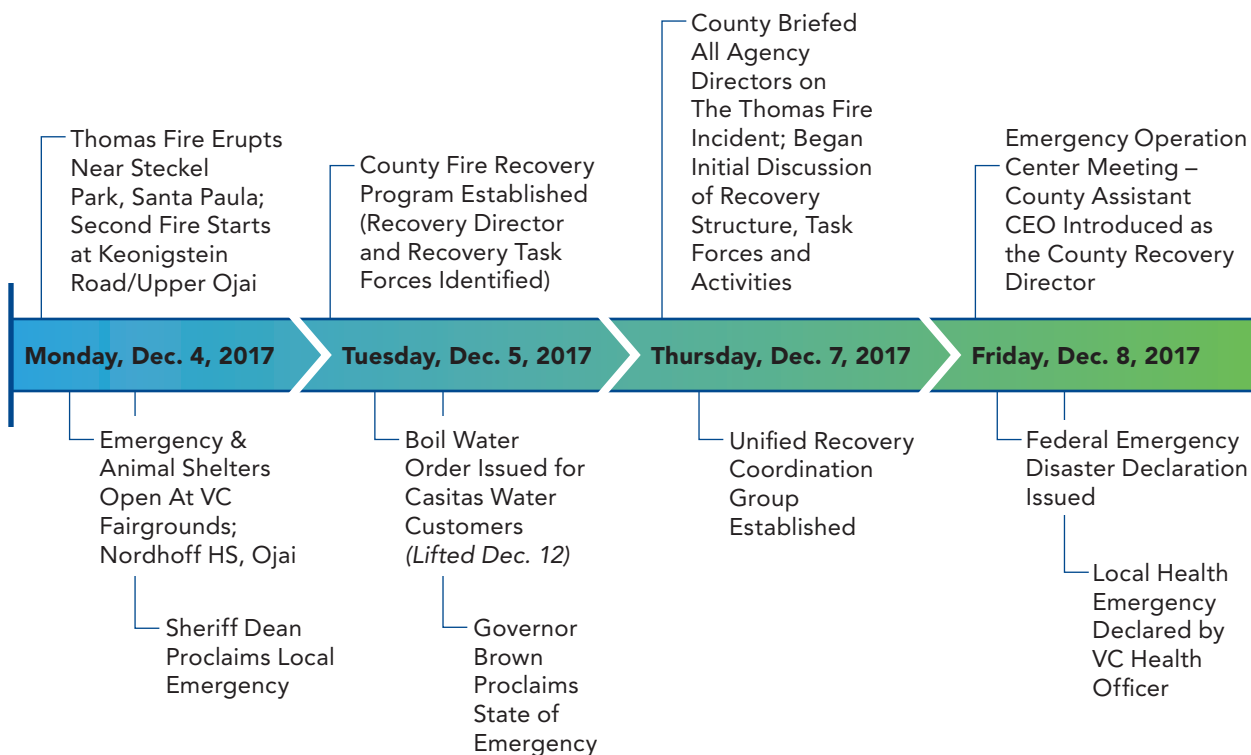
– STATS –

Community Meetings Held
13

Families served by Local
Assistance Center
1,950

CalFresh Disaster-Related
Food Benefits Issued
\$4.2 million

Thomas Fire Timeline



– STATS –

TREASURER/TAX COLLECTOR

229

Approved Cancellation of Penalty requests for late payment of property tax, totaling

\$64,527.15

in savings for First Responders and residents affected by evacuations or damaged/destroyed properties

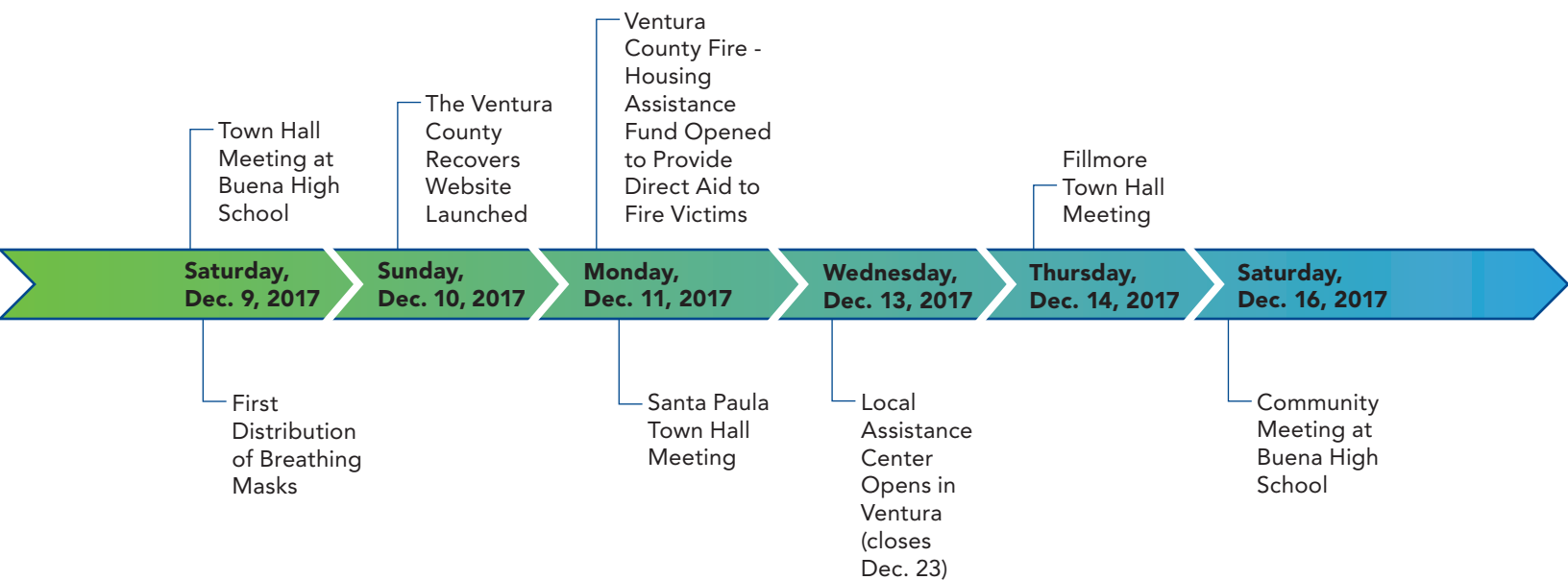
COUNTY CLERK-RECORDER

Vital and official records provided through next day service at no cost

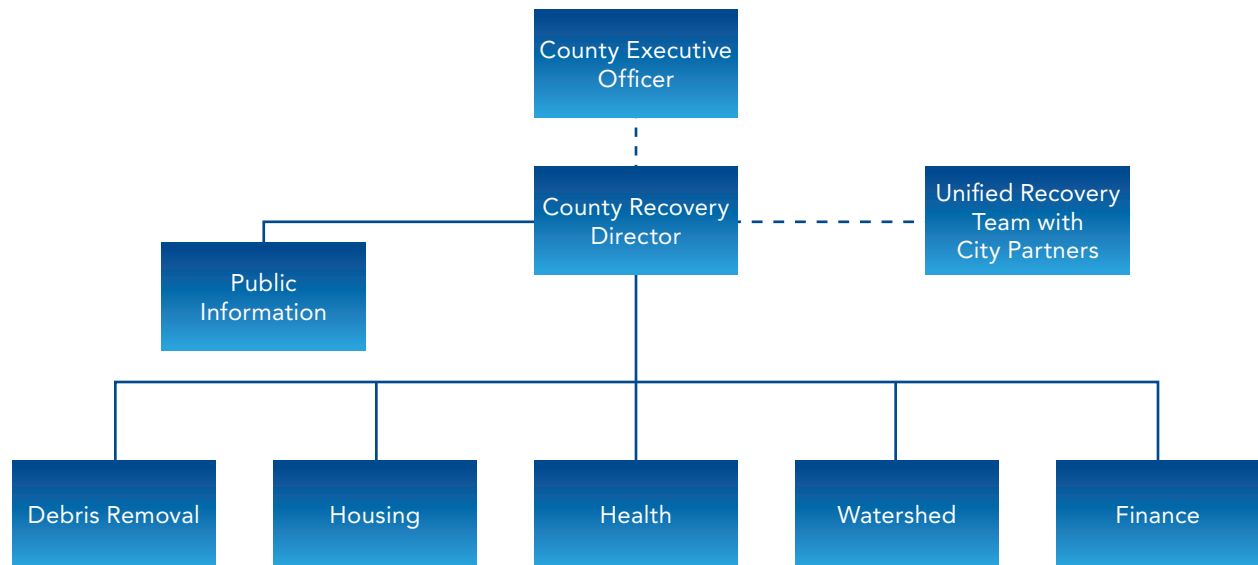
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Immediately following the establishment of the County's recovery program framework, the County Recovery Coordination Group gathered with all 25 Agency heads and 6 elected officials to lay the foundation for detailed County recovery activities. The Agency heads and elected officials were encouraged to be nimble and action-oriented, using all resources at hand to implement and support critical recovery activities focused primarily on the essential recovery areas of health, housing, watershed and debris removal. Should any roadblocks or impediments be encountered, an immediate call to the County Executive Office could be made for assistance. This gathering and empowerment of leadership was unique to the County's recovery approach and challenged all agencies to make the Thomas Fire recovery the highest priority. Also critical to the recovery activities was the continued support of the members of the Board of Supervisors, seen through rapid approval of numerous programs and initiatives as well as leading and attending a significant number of public gatherings (Town Halls, information and educational events).

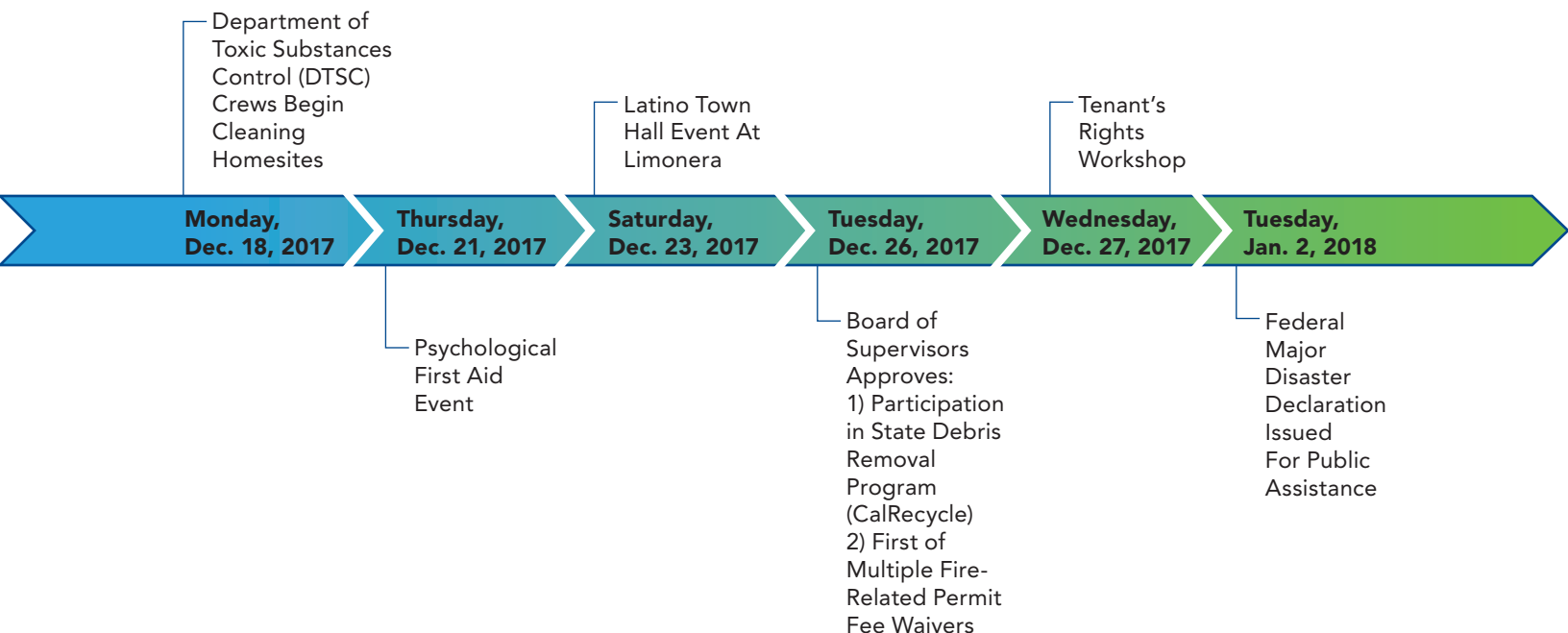
Thomas Fire Timeline



County of Ventura Thomas Fire Recovery Team



Thomas Fire Timeline



– STATS –

ASSESSOR

Properties reassessed
due to damage

1,330

HOUSING

Households funded by
Fire Assistance Funds

55

HEALTHCARE

Protective Breathing
Masks Distributed

750,000

Number of contacts made by
Behavioral Health Department

4,000



Thomas Fire Timeline

County
Environmental
Health
Division
Begins
Accepting
State Debris
Removal
Program
Applications

**Friday,
Jan. 5, 2018**

**Saturday,
Jan. 6, 2018**

First
CalRecycle
Informational
Meeting

First
Distribution
of Sandbags

**Monday,
Jan. 8, 2018**

**Tuesday,
Jan. 9, 2018**

Debris
Removal
Operations
Center
(DROC)
Opens

CalRecycle
Crews Begin
Homesite
Assessments

**Thursday,
Jan. 11, 2018**

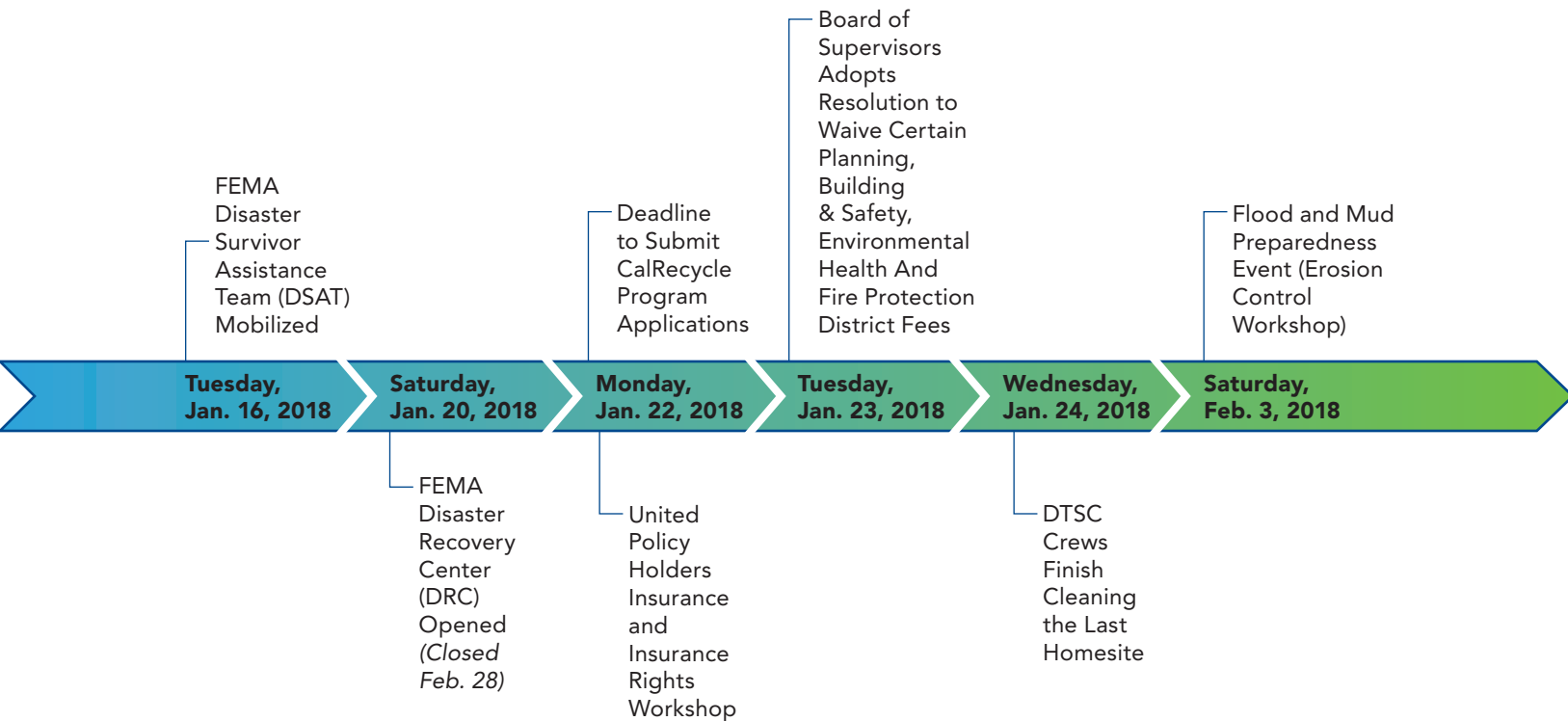
Federal
Major
Disaster
Declaration
Issued For
Individual
Assistance

**Monday,
Jan. 15, 2018**

CalRecycle
Crews
Begin
Cleaning
Homesites

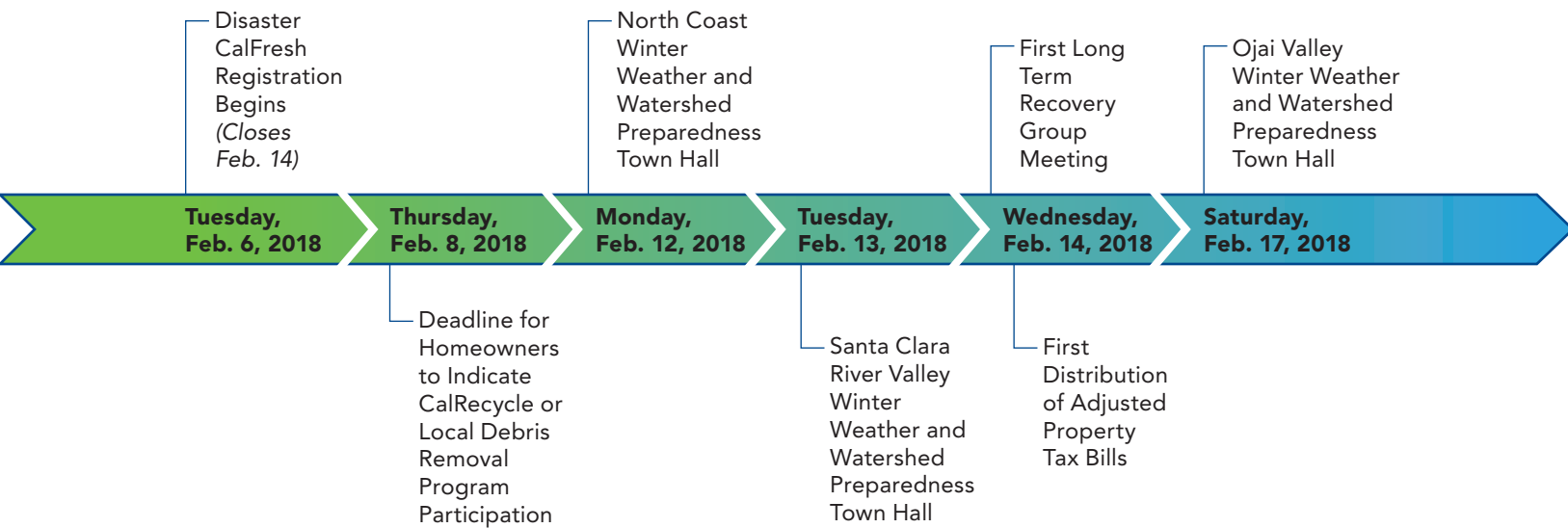


Thomas Fire Timeline

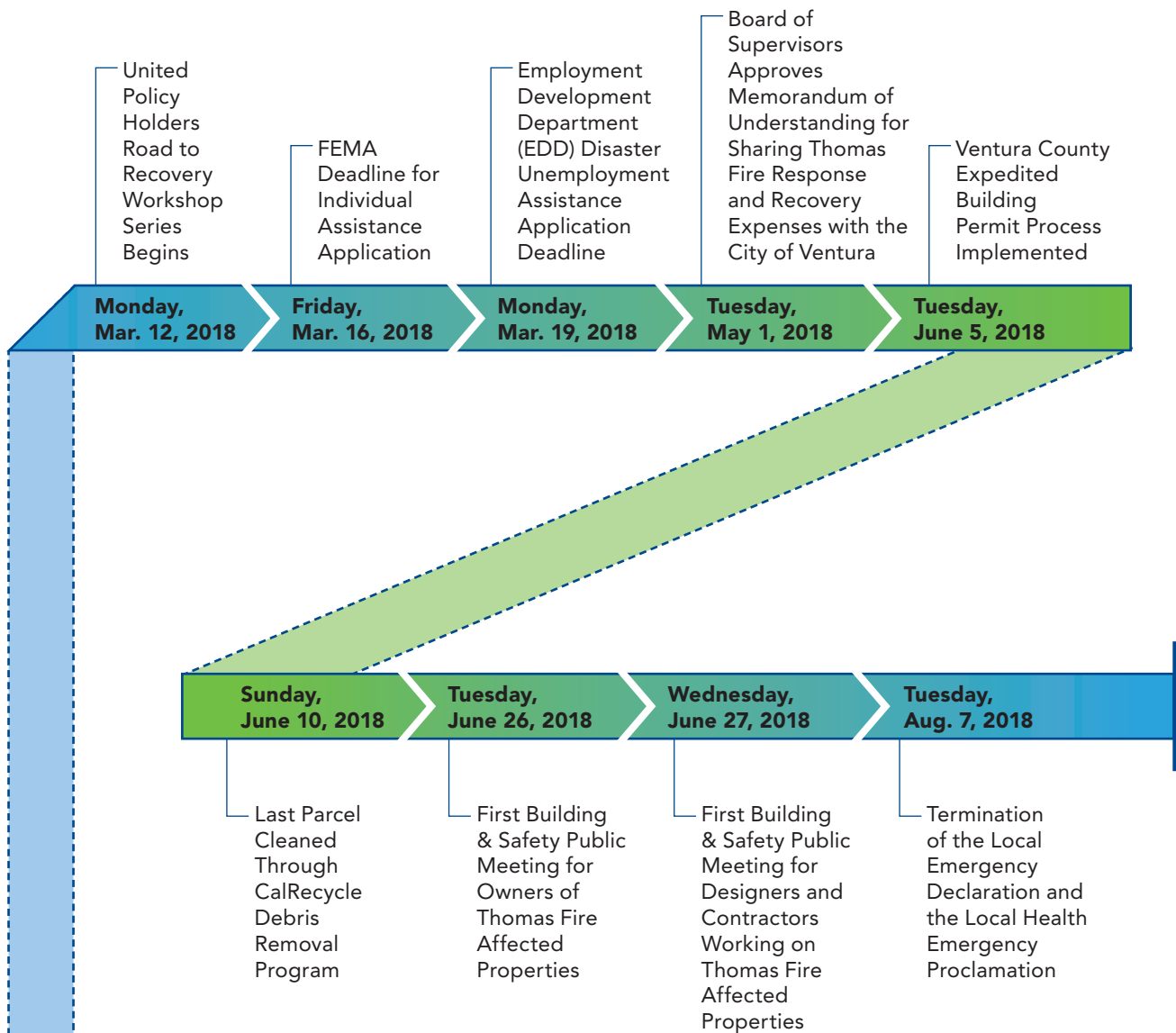




Thomas Fire Timeline



Thomas Fire Timeline



After-Action Review Analysis

GENERAL PROGRAM, INCLUDING LOCAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

STRENGTHS

- Rapid Implementation of Unified Recovery Programs Providing Cross-Jurisdictional (County and City) Recovery Services, Support and Information in Advance of Formal Agreements
- Unity of Effort and Strong Participation by Key Stakeholders of the Unified Recovery Coordination Group Resulting in a Coordinated Local Government Experience for Survivors
- Coordination Between Unified Recovery Coordination Group and County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
- Swift Opening of Local Assistance Center (LAC) to Provide Victims with Access to Local, State and Federal Support Agencies and Resources
 - LAC Coordination Between HSA (Organizational) and County EOC (Logistical)
 - County Resources Leveraged to Support LAC (Shelter Security and IT Services)
 - Continuous Staffing for Entire LAC Operation (10 Days)
- Timely Convening of Multiple Community Town Hall Meetings with Information on Fire, Health and Recovery Support Facilitated in Multiple Languages (Spanish and Sign Language)
- Assessor, Auditor-Controller and Tax Collector Completed Majority of Calamity Claims Adjustments to Damaged/Destroyed Property Assessments, and Associated Refunds, Within 4 Months (Statutorily Allowed up to 12 Months)
- County Clerk and Recorder Office Provided Next-Day Service for Lost Vital and Property Records at No Cost to Disaster Survivors

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Advanced Planning for Recovery Program and Program's Mission, Goals, Objectives and Roles

Establishment and effectiveness of future County disaster recovery efforts and programs could be improved with advance planning.

Analysis: Ventura County had not experienced a disaster on the level of the Thomas Fire since the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, which was prior to the establishment of the National Recovery Framework on which the County's Thomas Fire Recovery Program was based. Although the County's recovery program was quickly implemented, establishment of the Program's mission goals, objectives and roles might have benefitted from additional advanced planning.

Recommendation: Incorporate a formal Recovery Program Plan as a section (Annex) within the County's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

Pre-Disaster Recovery Training

Commitment to consistent training and disaster preparation, regardless of whether an anticipated event has the likelihood of materializing, is essential to disaster recovery preparedness and execution. County staff that has completed disaster recovery training prior to a disaster event will be better prepared and is more likely to perform at a more coordinated and effective level of performance.

Analysis: The County of Ventura can increase the use of available training programs focused on preparing employees for disaster recovery activities. In the event of a future disaster, such advanced recovery training could further expedite and improve the implementation and effectiveness of future recovery efforts and programs.

Recommendation:

1. Identify resources that provide recovery training and/or certifications on the FEMA National Recovery Framework and develop a training plan that is offered to all county employees.
2. Champion staff attendance at county-wide disaster recovery planning programs.

Comprehensive and Sharable Victim Case Management Information

Victim case management information is critical to the provisioning of meaningful and impactful recovery support as well as the ability to predict and provide needed recovery support over the short- and long-term perspectives.

Analysis: Initial assumptions concerning information gathered about disaster victims by the Red Cross and FEMA were incorrect, both in terms of the scope/depth of data collected as well as the organization's ability to share that information in a timely manner with the County of Ventura. This situation was not unique to Ventura County and has also been identified as an issue by State and Federal level organizations. The lack of data presented multiple challenges including but most specifically the inability to fully understand and assess current and future disaster victim needs. The inability to share disaster victim information with other recovery stakeholders created the situation where disaster victims were completing multiple applications/intake forms, creating "registration fatigue". The multiple registration points caused multiple lists of disaster victims to be created and housed within different entities, all containing different pieces of information. The end result was that there was not a complete, comprehensive list of disaster victims and their pertinent information.

Recommendation:

1. Develop a disaster victim data collection strategy and plan to capture sharable victim information, in a secure manner, early on in such venues as shelters and the Local Assistance Center (LAC), among other venues. Note: This issue is not unique to Ventura County and was identified as an area of potential improvement in the earlier Northern California fires. Potential addressing of this issue at the State or Federal level has been discussed.
2. Develop MOUs for sharing core disaster victim information with specified recovery agencies and stakeholders.
3. Identify and enhance opportunities to collaborate with organizations for information distribution and disaster victim/survivor communication/information gathering.

Donation Management (Financial and In-Kind)

Large financial and in-kind donations from various communities including the public, corporations, faith-based communities and not-for profits began arriving at the onset of the incident.

Analysis: No established official operational area donations management process or guideline existed prior to the Thomas Fire. This led to challenges in the decentralized management of both financial and in-kind donations.

Recommendation: Charter an EPC Ad Hoc Committee to develop donation standards and guidelines and determine the County's appropriate level of involvement with donation management, based on the specifics of each future disaster.

Process for Rapid Release of Damage Assessment Data to the General Public

Information on damaged structures needs to be released in a prompt and timely manner so that disaster survivors are aware of the extent of damage to their property and need for assistance.

Analysis: Initial damage assessment information was collected by the Debris Removal Task Force but was not released to residents and property owners prior to the lifting of evacuation orders and repopulation. Residents were inquiring as to the status of their property and structures, but the County did not have a process implemented to be able to share that information in a quick yet confidential manner.

Recommendation: Create and implement policies and protocols for making damage assessment information available to property owners and/or the public in a timely and confidential manner.

DEBRIS MANAGEMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION SUPPORT

STRENGTHS

- Early Declaration of a Local Health Emergency that Facilitated the Use of the Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC) Teams Within the Second Week of the Disaster
- Prioritization of County and City Approval of the State CalRecycle Debris Removal Program Which, When Completed, Accomplished Debris Removal From Approximately 90% of Destroyed Residences
- Rapid Assignment of County Environmental Health Division Staff and Resources to Facilitate Collection and Processing of Over 700 Right of Entry (ROE) Applications For Homes Within the City and Unincorporated County Areas, Demonstrating Compassion, Concern and Flexibility While Assisting Survivors in Completing and Collecting the Necessary Application Materials
- Quick Consensus of City and County Over Support and Management of the Debris Removal Program
- Effectiveness in Marketing the Consolidated Debris Removal Program to Disaster Victims
- Local Media Promotion of Information Sessions and Application Deadlines of the Consolidated Debris Removal Program
- Flexibility of Debris Removal Crews Accommodating Homeowners' Wishes
- Effects of Brush Clearance Codes and Enforcement
- Provision of Services (Town Halls, ROE Intake Sites) to Multiple Locations (Ventura, Ojai, Santa Paula and Fillmore)
- Creation of An Expedited Building Permit Review Process Which Provides A Streamlined Application Review for Unincorporated Area Structures Damaged or Destroyed in the Fire (Initial Review Completed Within Two Weeks of Receipt of Application)

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

County Process for Handling of Firearms and Ammunition When Discovered During Debris Removal Operations

Unsecured or damaged firearms and ammunition can pose a challenge/threat to disaster recovery workers when discovered during debris removal and clean-up activities.

Analysis: During the debris removal process, CalRecycle teams encountered multiple situations where firearms and/or ammunition was discovered in the rubble of destroyed structures. The Resource Management Agency (RMA) requested assistance from the Sheriff's Office in removing and disposing of these materials and consulted with the Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC) regarding the safe removal and disposal of the items. This consultation and discussion resulted in a significant delay in the debris removal for those specific structures.

Recommendation: RMA and the Sheriff's Office shall work to determine a procedure for handling/disposing of firearms and ammunition during a disaster.

Process to Request Commercial and/or Non-Residential Properties be Included in the State Debris Removal Program

The State Debris Removal Program is designed for residential properties (single-family houses and the corresponding sub-structures). Inclusion of other types of properties (commercial, industrial, non-residential) can only be done with written approval from CalOES and/or FEMA.

Analysis: The Debris Removal Task Force encountered significant challenges in receiving approval for multiple commercial and non-residential properties to be included in the State Debris Removal Program. These properties represented a significant amount of debris to be removed, and if unaddressed, would create a significant blight to the surrounding community. The process of having these properties approved and included in the debris removal program was complicated, lengthy, and very time consuming.

Recommendation:

1. Create a plan for interaction and communication with state and federal teams to facilitate the quick and efficient presentation of non-residential properties (public or private) for an eligibility determination.
2. Support efforts to improve the State Debris Removal Process as it relates to these properties.
3. Update the County Debris Removal Plan to include the State Debris Removal Program.

Process to Address Debris Removal if State Debris Removal Program is Not Approved or Available

The State Debris Removal Program is only available if disaster damage has reached a certain threshold or level of destruction.

Analysis: The State Debris Removal Program is overseen by CalOES and FEMA. If certain levels of destruction and damage are not demonstrated, use of the State Debris Removal Program will not be approved, leaving the affected region to utilize its own debris removal program.

Recommendation:

1. Update the County of Ventura Local Debris Removal Program to make it permanent and include all lessons learned from the Thomas Fire and recognize the addition of the State Debris Removal Program.
2. Document and include any differences in procedures dependent on whether the land being cleaned is publicly or privately owned.

Uncertainty Over Handling and Disposal of Cars and Refrigerators

Debris removal considerations must be applied to items other than structures, particularly those that pose a specific public health issue.

Analysis: Properties that were damaged or lost power posed a public health hazard from the spoiled food enclosed in refrigerators, freezers and other appliances. Removal of these materials can be accommodated through the State Debris Removal Program, if available. Damaged and destroyed cars also pose a public health hazard because of melted materials and potential for spilled automotive fluids and chemicals.

Recommendation:

1. Research and create a process for proper cataloging and disposal of damaged cars and appliances.
2. Work with the Cities to determine and adopt similar policies and procedures (identify disposal locations, potential haulers, and outline processes to best coordinate with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)).

Uncertainty Over Temporary Debris Storage Sites

Current County-permitted landfills could potentially not have the capacity to accept disaster-related debris.

Analysis: While County-permitted landfills were able to accommodate the debris created by the Thomas Fire, there was concern if requests from Santa Barbara County to receive debris from the Montecito Mudslides could be accommodated. Should a mudslide occur within Ventura County, questions were raised as to what temporary debris storage sites would be available to use to store, sort and then distribute flood and mud debris.

Recommendation:

1. Discuss policy-related questions related to handling in-county and out-of-county debris.
2. Research and create a list of potential temporary and permanent debris storage sites and transfer facilities.
3. Identify characteristics of potential sites to guide in additional identification of debris storage sites and transfer facilities.
4. Identify and create a list of potential debris haulers for both the County and private property owners to utilize.

HUMAN SERVICES AND HOUSING

STRENGTHS

- Quick Organization, Opening and Staffing of the Local Assistance Center
- Rapid Establishment of the Housing Assistance Program, a First-of-its-Kind Local Program With Increased Income Limits and Increased Participant Eligibility To Support Fire Victims
- Use of the Existing HomeShare Program to House Disaster Victims
- Utilization of a Jurisdiction's Best Practices for the Entire Burn Area (Temporary Housing and RV Ordinance)
- Successful Application for the California Wildfires National Dislocated Worker Grant

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Provision of Housing Assistance

Disaster survivors who lost access to housing (through property damage or destruction) had the expectation that substantial housing support would be provided.

Analysis: Ventura County was in a housing deficit prior to the Thomas Fire incident, which was complicated by the loss of numerous permitted and unpermitted structures. FEMA Housing support is extremely limited. In an effort to mitigate these environmental restrictions, the County of Ventura implemented a unique, first-of-its-kind program with the Housing Assistance Fund. This fund allocated \$500,000 and was established within the first week of the incident, and more than 5 weeks prior to when state, federal, municipal and private housing assistance ultimately became available. This fund had a significant impact and assisted in the housing of 55 households while facilitating the case management of over 200 individuals. Additionally, the Housing Assistance Team worked to connect disaster victims with housing openings provided by networking with local property managers and realtors.

Recommendation: Charter an Ad Hoc Committee to explore other potential housing assistance programs and determine the County's appropriate level of involvement.

LAC Appointment Scheduling Process was Cumbersome and Unable to Make Modifications

The logistical location of the LAC caused concern regarding the number of visitors that could be accommodated, leading to the internal creation of a scheduling program for LAC appointments.

Analysis: In order to facilitate a large number of anticipated visits and to mitigate traffic and parking problems inherent to the physical location of the LAC, a scheduling system was devised to schedule appointments for disaster survivors to visit the LAC and receive assistance for specific services. This appointment system was cumbersome, did not allow for appointment changes, and relied on the use of the 2-1-1 operator system. Additionally, because there was not a direct number to contact the LAC, disaster survivors could only contact 2-1-1 for any LAC-related questions.

Recommendations:

1. Identify options for an intake and case management system, which may include appointment scheduling that can be used at the LAC or at similar gatherings.
2. Develop an MOU with 2-1-1 outlining roles and expectations for both response and recovery.
3. Include 2-1-1 with future disaster response training.

HEALTHCARE

STRENGTHS

- Provision of On-Site Medical Care at Shelter, Preventing ~100 Patients from Transfer to Emergency Department
- Distribution of More than 750,000 Protective Breathing Masks
- Determination of Prescription Refill Process for Disaster Survivors
- Facilitation of Approval with Insurance Carriers for Patients to See Physicians Outside of Primary Care Physician Due to Medical Practice Closure During the Disaster
- Provision of Behavioral Health Staff to Escort Fire Victims Back to Their Property
- Rapid Development and Significant Outreach of the CA HOPE Team to Support the Emotional Needs of Residents Through the Recovery Process
- Consistent Staffing of LAC and Community Town Hall Meetings by the EMS, Public Health and Behavioral Health Departments to Address Health-Related Questions

- Postings Made Available by the Public Health Officer of All Requested Topics Related to the Recovery from a Health Perspective in English and Spanish
- Coordination of Emergency Medical Services Resources with Healthcare Stakeholders Throughout the Ventura County Health Care Coalition
- Extensive Volunteer Time Given to Facilitate the Care of Over 2,000 Animals During the Disaster and Immediate Recovery Period
- Continued Acute Care, Emergency Surgery, Emergency and Trauma Services at VCMC Despite a 4-day Power Outage

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Necessity for Public Health Officer to Research Answers to Health-Related Questions/Concerns as Well as Out-Of-Scope Questions

Public Health fielded a great variety of health and non-health questions in relation to the fire, many of which required extensive research in order to answer.

Analysis: Residents and disaster survivors submitted numerous questions through multiple channels. In order to provide the best information possible, the Public Health Officer and staff conducted extensive research, pulling information from a number of different sources including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), FEMA and California Counties that had experienced similar natural disasters. This research was time consuming, and sometimes led to a delay in providing information (only because of an abundance of caution to provide the best and most relevant information).

Recommendation:

1. Identify information sources in advance that can provide accurate information on disaster-related health issues.
2. Create a library of health information materials and FAQs created during the Thomas Fire incident and continue developing this library to include health information for other natural disasters that could affect Ventura County in the future.

Need for Greater Unity on Addressing the Healthcare Ramifications of a Natural Disaster on the General Population

A coordinated and efficient method to distribute health-related information is critical to supporting the Medical Community's ability to support and address the health of the general public during a natural disaster.

Analysis: Doctors not affiliated with one of the major health providers do not have access to the same level of information. The Ventura County Health Care Coalition offers one conduit for ensuring the same health-related information is provided to the major health providers as well as the freestanding doctors.

Recommendation: Refine response activities that coordinate care provided by acute care hospitals and other health care providers, recognizing that the nature and location of future disasters can cause a potential delay in the response of outside resources (mobile hospitals, medical planes and supplies, etc.).

WATERSHED DEBRIS FLOWS/LANDSLIDES

STRENGTHS

- Pre-Incident All County Watershed and Transportation Facilities Cleaned to Clean Water Standards
- Post-Incident All County Watershed and Transportation Facilities Cleaned to Dirty Water Standards Within 45 Days
- Proactive Construction of Culverts and Road Cleaning Activities Post-Incident
- Provision and Distribution of Sandbags and Other Protective Measures for Both County and Cities
- Post-Fire Debris Flow Symposium Which Allowed Public to Meet Directly with Vendors of Flood and Debris Flow Mitigation Products and Services
- Strategic Use of Aerial Resources in Assisting with Damage Assessments
- Sophisticated Instrumentation to Assess/Forecast Post-Fire Debris Flows Threat (Rain Gauges, Telemetry, etc.)
- Accessibility of Real-Time Rain Information Accessible by the Public (www.vcemergency.com)
- Successful Suppression of the Oil Seep Fires
- Expertise in Weather Forecasting for a Variety of Post Fire Forecast Time Periods

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Formalized Burn Area Hazard Assessment Program to Enhance Coordination Between County and City Response Agencies

Similar to other aspects of the Recovery Program, rebuilding of infrastructure from a disaster is not restricted to City or County boundaries, requiring different jurisdictions to work together to accomplish the repairing of infrastructure in the most expedited manner possible.

Analysis: Currently there is not a program to plan and coordinate public works infrastructure Recovery Activities that include both County and City participants.

Recommendation: Formalize Burn Area Hazard Assessment Program to enhance coordination between County and City Response agencies. Program framework should identify roles and responsibilities for Emergency Services, Fire/Rescue, Law Enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, Public Works and General Government Administration.

FINANCE

STRENGTHS

- Early Agreement Between County and Cities to Share Multiple Recovery-Related Costs
- Adherence by County and City to Cost Accounting Principles in Maintaining Financial Records for Fire-Related Expenses
- Fire, Law Enforcement, Public Works and EMS Recording of Incident-Related Personnel Hours and Expenses
- County OES Oversight Support of Federal Public Assistance Program Reimbursement Process

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Develop A Formal Cost Sharing Agreement Between the County and All 10 Cities

Recovery activities can present a significant financial obstacle due to the unexpected and immediate nature of a disaster. Having a written cost sharing agreement for those expenses that can be identified in advance (such as shelters, sandbags, etc.), can help expedite the immediate implementation of shared recovery activities and required provisions.

Analysis: The County of Ventura absorbed a significant amount of the initial costs for shared recovery activities, including the Disaster Shelters and the LAC. Although cost-sharing with the city of Ventura was timely agreed to shortly following the start of the Thomas Fire, prior to a formal development of a MOU, there exists a current operational MOU between the County of Ventura and all ten cities that can be updated to address anticipated shared disaster and recovery expenses for advanced anticipated items/expenses.

Recommendation: Identify statutorily allowed provisions which could be incorporated into the existing operational area MOU between the County and the 10 cities to share disaster and recovery expenses for items and expenses that can be anticipated in advance.

Agency and Department Tracking and Recording of Incident-Related Personnel Hours Worked During a Disaster

In many general government agencies and departments, employee time worked is not normally tracked by project or event and exempt employee hours worked in excess of 40 hours are not normally tracked or recorded. During a disaster, such practices can adversely impact future disaster-related reimbursements and make it more difficult to determine the need for authorizing exempt employee pay for hours worked in excess of 40 hours per week during long duration disasters.

Analysis: The Public Works Agency (PWA), the Sheriff's Office and the Fire Protection District have programs in place to document all employee time worked on a disaster event, including exempt employee time over 40 hours. Other agencies do not have similar policies in place and in some cases did not consistently record and track all disaster or recovery-related work hours or expenses in the early time period following the start of the Thomas Fire. Not consistently tracking disaster and recovery-related expenses may jeopardize Federal, State or insurance reimbursement of such expenses. (Note: The County Executive Office directed such tracking by all agencies and departments immediately following the start of the Thomas Fire.) Additionally, tracking of exempt employee overtime will facilitate determination (justification) of the need for exempt employee overtime in the event of extraordinary hours worked during future disasters.

Recommendation: Establish a formal policy and guidelines for all agencies and department to begin tracking emergency related time and expenses in the event of future disaster, both exempt and non-exempt employees.

Capturing and Documenting Lost Revenue

Multiple County revenue streams were adversely impacted as a result of the Thomas Fire and in some cases identifying the amount of such lost revenue was difficult.

Analysis: County programs and facilities that generate revenue experienced a decrease in revenue during the Thomas Fire. This lost revenue was not consistently tracked in real time and in some cases had to be forensically determined.

Recommendation: Create and implement standardized protocols to track lost revenue from the beginning of a disaster.

Navigation of the Federal Public Assistance Program

Tracking and reporting of disaster and recovery-related costs eligible for reimbursement through state and federal disaster public assistance programs are complicated and require extensive documentation and experience.

Analysis: Due to the complex nature of the Federal Public Assistance Program accounting and the restriction of expenses that can be reimbursed, extensive effort by the County OES was required to support the County's public entity cost reimbursement efforts.

County OES traditionally has served in a lead role supporting the collecting of information and submission of the County's applications/claims for available State and Federal reimbursements. Given the scope of the Thomas Fire disaster response and recovery effort, significant additional workload was required on the part of County OES staff to support agencies and departments. Although the County Executive Office arranged for extra help staff to assist County OES staff, in the future it would be beneficial for agency and department staff to be more familiar with disaster cost reimbursement processes and requirements and for CEO staff to be able to take a larger role in both leading and supporting large-scale disaster reimbursement efforts.

Recommendation:

1. Arrange for attendance by County CEO and agency/department fiscal staff at available disaster accounting and reimbursement training.
2. Create a mentor-based training process with pre-identified County personnel that can step into the public assistance role.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

STRENGTHS

- Early Establishment of a Joint Information Center (JIC) to Disseminate Recovery Related Information
- Timely Creation of the VenturaCountyRecovers Website in Both English and Spanish
- Frequent and Ongoing Updates to Websites and Social Media
- Use of Common County/City Branding During the Initial Recovery Activities
- Direct Contact with Affected Residents Through the Use of Email Sign-Up System

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Coordination of Press Releases

Distribution of information through multiple organizations needs to be well timed, commonly branded to avoid confusion and communicated through a variety of channels.

Analysis: At the beginning of the recovery activities, the County and the Cities coordinated the release of press releases, used a common website branding template, and utilized multiple media channels to ensure the communicated message reached multiple audiences in the same format at the same time. As the recovery activities progressed, there was a lapse of coordination between the County and cities. For example, press releases were not reviewed or shared between jurisdictions prior to publication.

Recommendation:

1. In future cases of unified disaster response and recovery, ensure County and City Public Information Officers (PIO) remain tightly integrated until mutually agreed upon.
2. To avoid confusion and provide a means for residents to be confident they are receiving official and accurate information, utilize previously created VenturaCountyRecovers website and common branding for future unified (large-scale) disaster recovery efforts.

PIO Staff Availability to Serve Within Joint Information System Structure

The Public Information component of disaster response and recovery is critical to maintaining timely, accurate communication of information with the general public.

Analysis: The majority of PIO functions within the County are assigned as a responsibility ancillary to normal work activities. In the event of a disaster, it can be challenging to gather the PIO coverage needed to maintain continuous resources and support the Joint Information System Structure, as well as all following recovery activities.

Recommendations:

1. Create a plan to leverage general PIO staff (throughout the County) as well as PIO staff from cities and other outside stakeholders when departmental representatives are not available.
2. Develop and document strategies to better utilize the media to assist in communicating recovery information.
3. Designate internal County staff (minimum of one per department) as responsible for PIO activities in case of a disaster, and provide a base level of training covering disaster response and recovery responsibilities.

Language Translation of All Materials and Information (Websites, Emails, Press Releases, etc.)

Public information materials should be communicated in multiple languages, specifically the languages most commonly spoken within the region.

Analysis: Ventura County residents speak numerous languages (Chinese, Mixteco, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese and many others), with Spanish representing the largest population of bilingual speakers. During the early phase of the disaster response and recovery effort, some initial public information materials were not released in a coordinated manner with both Spanish and English materials being released at the same time. Consistent with common practices utilized up until the 2017 statewide wildfires, website information translation was in many cases translated automatically through Google Translate. However, shortly after the start of the fire the County was informed such automated translation was not sufficiently accurate for the Spanish speaking population. Based on the feedback received from the public, processes were changed immediately to provide all disaster and recovery information, press releases and notifications simultaneously in both English and Spanish, and provide personal translation of website materials conducted by bilingual County Staff. Additionally, translation services at Town Halls and other informational and educational events were provided in Spanish as well as American Sign Language.

Recommendation:

1. Coordinate the release of recovery information in multiple languages at the same time. Explore the possibility of utilizing the County Emergency Hotline (utilizing Voyance Translation Services) to provide real-time over-the-phone translation of recovery information in 225 languages when the coordinated release of translated materials is not available.

2. Maximize the use of the 2,000+ bilingual-certified County employees and facilitate their involvement in future disaster recovery activities.
3. Create a communication plan that maximizes the use of faith-based organizations, schools, social media, Latino radio stations, local newspapers and other media channels to reach bilingual populations.
4. Leverage multicultural community representatives (Chinese, Mixteco, Tagalog, Vietnamese and others) to disseminate recovery information outside of the normal media channels.
5. Identify opportunities to further expand bilingual PIO resources and capabilities within the County Executive Office and agencies and departments to ensure the consistent publication of information in Spanish can be sustained and support is available to those agencies and departments that may not have the resources to provide real-time information translation. (Note: A full-time bilingual PIO has recently been hired within the County Executive Office.)



Improvement Plan Performance Matrix

ISSUE	RECOMMENDED SOLUTION	LEAD COORDINATION AGENCY(IES)	ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIMELINE	PERFORMANCE STATUS
General Program, including Local Assistance Center				
Advance Planning for Recovery Program and Program's Mission, Goals, Objectives and Roles	Incorporate a formal Recovery Program Plan as a section (Annex) within the County's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)	CEO	Mar-19	In-Progress
Pre-Disaster Recovery Training	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify resources that provide recovery training and/or certifications on the FEMA National Recovery Framework and develop a training plan that is offered to all County employees 2. Champion staff attendance at county-wide disaster recovery planning programs 	CEO; HSA; VCOES	Mar-19	Planned
Comprehensive and Sharable Victim Case Management Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a disaster victim data collection strategy and a plan to capture sharable victim information, in a secure manner, early on in such venues as shelters and the Local Assistance Center (LAC), among other venues 2. Develop MOUs for sharing core disaster victim information with specified recovery agencies and stakeholders 3. Identify and enhance opportunities to collaborate with organizations for information distribution and disaster victim/ survivor communication/ information gathering 	CEO; HSA; VCOES	Jul-20	Planned
Donation Management (Financial and In-Kind)	Charter an EPC Ad Hoc Committee to develop donation standards and guidelines and determine the County's appropriate level of involvement with donation management, based on the specifics of each future disaster	VCOES	Jul-19	In-Progress
Process for Rapid Release of Damage Assessment Data to the General Public	Create and implement policies and protocols for making damage assessment information available to property owners and/or the public in a timely and confidential manner	RMA; VCOES	Jul-20	Planned

Improvement Plan Performance Matrix (cont.)

Debris Removal				
County Process for Handling of Firearms and Ammunition When Discovered During Debris Removal Operations	RMA and the Sheriff's Office shall work to determine a procedure for handling/disposing of firearms and ammunition during a disaster	RMA; Sheriff; VCOES	Jul-20	Planned
Process to Request Commercial and/ or Non-Residential Properties be Included in the State Debris Removal Program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a plan for interaction and communication with state and federal teams to facilitate the quick and efficient presentation of non-residential properties (public or private) for an eligibility determination 2. Support efforts to improve the State Debris Removal Program as it relates to these properties 3. Update the County Debris Removal Plan to include the State Debris Removal Program 	PWA; RMA; VCOES	Jul-20	In-Progress
Process to Address Debris Removal if State Debris Removal Program is Not Approved or Available	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update the County of Ventura Local Debris Removal Program to make it permanent and include all lessons learned from the Thomas Fire and recognize the addition of the State Debris Removal Program 2. Document and include any differences in procedure dependent on whether the land being cleaned is publicly or privately owned 	PWA; RMA; VCOES	Jul-20	Planned
Uncertainty Over Handling and Disposal of Cars and Refrigerators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research and create a process for proper cataloging and disposal of damaged cars and appliances 2. Work with the Cities to determine and adopt similar policies and procedures (identify disposal locations, potential haulers, and outline processes to best coordinate with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)) 	PWA; RMA; Cities	Jul-20	Planned
Uncertainty Over Temporary Debris Storage Sites	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss policy-related questions related to handling in-county and out-of-county debris 2. Research and create a list of potential temporary and permanent debris storage sites and transfer facilities 3. Identify characteristics of potential sites to guide in additional identification of debris storage sites and transfer facilities 4. Identify and create a list of potential debris haulers for both the County and private property owners to utilize 	PWA; RMA; Cities	Dec-19	Planned

Improvement Plan Performance Matrix (cont.)

Human Services and Housing				
Provision of Housing Assistance	1. Charter an Ad Hoc Committee to explore other potential housing assistance programs and determine the County's appropriate level of involvement	CEO; HSA	Jul-20	Planned
LAC Appointment Scheduling Process was Cumbersome and Unable to Make Modifications	1. Identify options for an intake and case management system, which may include appointment scheduling that can be used at the LAC or at similar gatherings 2. Develop an MOU with 2-1-1 outlining roles and expectations for both response and recovery 3. Include 2-1-1 with future disaster response training	HSA; ITSD	Jul-20	Planned
Healthcare				
Necessity for Public Health Officer to Research Answers to Health-Related Questions/Concerns as Well as Out-Of-Scope Questions	1. Identify information sources in advance that can provide accurate information on disaster-related health issues 2. Create a library of health information materials and FAQs created during the Thomas Fire incident and continue developing this library to include health information for other natural disasters that could affect Ventura County in the future	HCA; CEO; RMA	Jul-19	In-Progress
Need for Greater Unity on Addressing the Healthcare Ramifications of a Natural Disaster on the General Population	Refine response activities that coordinate care provided by acute care hospitals and other health care providers, recognizing that the nature and location of future disasters can cause a potential delay in the response of outside resources (mobile hospitals, medical planes and supplies, etc.)	HCA	Jul-20	Planned
Watershed Debris Flows/Landslides				
Formalized Burn Area Hazard Assessment Program to Enhance Coordination Between County and City Response Agencies	Formalize Burn Area Hazard Assessment Program to enhance coordination between County and City Response agencies. Program framework should identify roles and responsibilities for Emergency Services, Fire/Rescue, Law Enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, Public Works and General Government Administration	VCOES; PWA	Jul-19	In-Progress

Improvement Plan Performance Matrix (cont.)

Finance				
Develop A Formal Cost Sharing Agreement Between the County and All 10 Cities	Identify statutorily allowed provisions which could be incorporated into the existing operational area MOU between the County and the 10 cities to share disaster and recovery expenses for items and expenses that can be anticipated in advance	CEO; County Counsel; VCOES	Dec-19	Planned
Agency and Department Tracking and Recording of Incident-Related Personnel Hours Worked During a Disaster	Establish a formal policy and guidelines for all agencies and departments to begin tracking emergency-related time and expenses in the event of future disasters, both exempt and non-exempt employees	CEO	Mar-19	Planned
Capturing and Documenting Lost Revenue	Create and implement standardized protocols to track lost revenue from the beginning of a disaster	CEO	Mar-19	Planned
Navigation of the Federal Public Assistance Program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arrange for attendance by County CEO and agency/department fiscal staff at available disaster accounting and reimbursement training 2. Create a mentor-based training program with pre-identified County personnel that can step into the public assistance role 	CEO; VCOES	Sept-19	Planned
Public Information				
Coordination of Press Releases	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In future cases of unified disaster response and recovery, ensure County and City PIOs remain tightly integrated until mutually agreed upon 2. To avoid confusion and provide a means for residents to be confident they are receiving official and accurate information, utilize previously created VenturaCountyRecovers website and common branding for future unified (large-scale) disaster recovery efforts 	CEO	N/A	Completed
PIO Staff Availability to Serve Within Joint Information System Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a plan to leverage general PIO staff (throughout the County) as well as PIO staff from cities and other outside stakeholders when departmental representatives are not available 2. Develop and document strategies to better utilize the media to assist in communicating recovery information 3. Designate internal County staff (minimum of one per department) as responsible for PIO activities in case of a disaster, and provide a base level of training covering disaster response and recovery responsibilities 	CEO	Dec-19	Planned

Improvement Plan Performance Matrix (cont.)

Language Translation of All Materials and Information (Websites, Emails, Press Releases, etc.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordinate the release of recovery information in multiple languages at the same time. Explore the possibility of utilizing the County Emergency Hotline (utilizing Voyance Translation Services) to provide real-time over-the-phone translation of recovery information in 225 languages when the coordinated release of translated materials is not available. 2. Maximize the use of the 2,000+ bilingual-certified County employees and facilitate their involvement in future disaster response and recovery activities 3. Create a communication plan that maximizes the use of faith-based organizations, schools, social media, Latino radio stations, local newspapers and other media channels to reach bilingual populations 4. Leverage multicultural representatives (Chinese, Mixteco, Tagalog, Vietnamese and others) to disseminate recovery information outside of the normal media channels. 5. Identify opportunities to further expand bilingual PIO resources and capabilities within the County Executive Office and agencies and departments to ensure the consistent publication of information in Spanish can be sustained and support is available to those agencies and departments that may not have the resources to provide real-time information translation" 	CEO	Dec-19	<p>In-Progress</p> <p>(NOTE: A full-time bilingual PIO has recently been hired within the County Executive Office)</p>
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Glossary of Terms

AAR Abbreviations

CalOES	California Office of Emergency Services
CalRecycle	California Department of Resources, Recycling & Recovery
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CEO	County Executive Office
DMV	Department of Motor Vehicles
DTSC	Department of Toxic Substances Control
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
EPC	Emergency Planning Council
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HCA	Health Care Agency
HSA	Human Services Agency
LAC	Local Assistance Center
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBVC	Naval Base Ventura County
PIO	Public Information Officer
PWA	Public Works Agency
RMA	Resource Management Agency
ROE	Right of Entry
VCMC	Ventura County Medical Center

Participating Agencies

IN GRATITUDE FOR CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS:

American Red Cross	County of Ventura Public Works Agency
ARES Amateur Radio Emergency Services	County of Ventura PWA Watershed Protection District
Auxiliary Communications Service	County of Ventura Resource Management Agency
Buddhist Tzu Chi	County of Ventura RMA Building & Safety
California Department of Insurance/ Insurance Commissioner	County of Ventura RMA Environmental Health
California Department of Social Services	County of Ventura RMA Planning
California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle)	County of Ventura Tax Collector
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES)	FEMA
California HOPE	Food Share
California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA)	Habitat for Humanity
Catholic Charities	Help of Ojai
CAUSE (805 Undocufund)	Jewish Family Services
Church of Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints	Interface 211 Ventura County
Church of Scientology	Kaiser Permanente
City of Ojai	Mennonite Disaster Service
City of Ventura	Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP)
CLU Center for Nonprofit Leadership Thomas Fire Resiliency Task Force	New Creations Community Church
County of Ventura Animal Services Department	Rescue Mission
County of Ventura Assessor	The Salvation Army
County of Ventura Auditor-Controller	Thomas Fire Long Term Recovery Group
County of Ventura Behavioral Health	ThomasFireHelp.org
County of Ventura Board of Supervisors	Totally Local VC's Local Love Project
County of Ventura Clerk Recorder	United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)
County of Ventura County Executive Office	United Policy Holders
County of Ventura Emergency Medical Services Agency	United Way of Ventura County
County of Ventura General Services Agency	Upper Ojai Relief
County of Ventura Health Care Agency	Ventura County Air Pollution Control District
County of Ventura Human Services Agency	Ventura County Area Housing Agency
County of Ventura Information Technology Services	Ventura County Community Foundation
County of Ventura Public Health Department	Ventura County Sheriff's Office
	Ventura County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services
	Ventura County YMCA
	Volunteer Organization Active in Disasters (VOAD)

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