

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Overview

Humboldt County's *Active Shooter/CMCI Collaborative Protocol* and training unites 69 Law, Fire, and EMS agencies, paying off with increased trust and day-to-day cooperation.

### Challenge

Public expectations continue to rise regarding effective public safety response to Active Shooters and other Criminal Multi-Casualty-Incidents (CMCIs). Two decades after Columbine, many agencies now recognize their responsibilities extend beyond simply "stop the killing", and now must include "stop the dying". The most progressive department leaders recognize that stopping the dying requires the development of collaborative protocols and proactive training involving EMS, Fire, and Law in advance of such an event. Indeed, California Assembly Bill 1598 (Sept. 2014) explicitly demands that such protocols and interagency relationships be established in all regions of the state for coordinated, integrative, and effective multi-agency response to such incidents.

The expectations established by AB-1598 were based (in part) on post-incident analysis of the challenging chaos created when several hundred first responders self-deployed at LAX Terminal 3 within minutes of Paul Ciancia attacking TSA workers with an assault rifle in November 2013. There were several shortfalls in that multi-agency response, but public outrage was the loudest after disclosure that the gunman's first victim laid unattended and untreated near an exit door for 33 minutes. The Terminal 3 shooting and other CMCI response studies confirm that even in a big metropolitan county with big departments, there is a need to plan and train together.

In our mostly rural Humboldt County (pop 135,000), we acknowledge the risk of a violent critical incident occurring anywhere in our 4,000+ square miles. We have our fair share of gunmen, barricaded suspects, and shootings. Our special events draw large crowds, and we have population concentrations in our cities, schools, college, and university. We are concerned that some studies indicate active shooters are attacking in smaller communities disproportionately more often than in large US cities.

In addition to the risk of attack, we face the reality of first responder agency shortfalls. Humboldt County is isolated from any major urban center resources by 4-6 hours driving time. Within our county's borders, it can take three hours to move emergency resources from one place to another. Further complicating our reality here is that our 69 EMS, Fire, and Law agencies have quietly evolved over time in their own "silos", developing differing internal approaches and procedures unique to each entity.

The different procedures and vocabulary used by our small agencies in past critical incident responses have resulted in interpersonal friction and inefficiency, but thankfully we have not lost lives as a result. In some cases, we were probably more lucky than prepared. Veteran public safety leaders behind the "redwood curtain" of Humboldt County have realized: (1) we need to improve our capacity to work collaboratively during any emergency, and (2) during the

response to an Active Shooter or CMCI, we will have to stitch together our own patchwork quilt of ten or more small agencies to work effectively together for hours until more help arrives. In short, we need a common sheet of music for multi-disciplinary, multi-agency response to a violent critical incident.

## Solution

An obvious approach for the “common sheet of music” problem was to simply redouble efforts to train reluctant responders on the use of the Incident Command System (ICS). The value of ICS in wildfires and planned event management was widely acknowledged, but many influential law officers were not initially enthusiastic about embracing ICS as an organizational structure for emergencies, especially during an unfolding violent incident. We have noted very poor real-world outcomes from simply mandating cops, firefighters, and paramedics that they must complete online ICS training programs. (Nevertheless, we did not lose sight of ICS as the project unfolded. In fact, we noted that AB-1598 language specifically mentions lawmakers’ expectation that regional Active Shooter protocols will include ICS and Unified Command. We embraced these concepts and other strengths of ICS as we moved ahead.)

We also became aware that there was no existing procedural manual with standardized vocabulary and response options for an integrated EMS, Fire, and Law response to an Active Shooter or CMCI that was suitable to roll out in rural Humboldt County. Some big metropolitan agencies shared policies and procedures that were impressive but not adaptable here. Some of our local agencies sent personnel to outside trainers, but the ideas they brought back did not have a county-wide impact. We decided to create our own countywide manual.

To create the new manual, Humboldt County Sheriff William Honsai prioritized the effort and outreach we needed for input and buy-in from our 69 EMS, Fire, and Law agencies. We needed to meet, work and train together with personnel representing all three disciplines to identify the practices that would be workable across our county. With agreement from local agency leaders, we sought to create just one (1) deliverable work product from our outreach: a standardized local reference manual and foundation for both response and training. This later became the *Humboldt County Criminal Multi-Casualty Incident (CMCI) Collaborative Response Protocol*.

We traveled the county to meet EMS, Fire, and Law agencies, allowing for all agencies to feel heard and included in the process. In small groups, we refined the principles and guidelines to be included in the proposed *Protocol* document. We conducted half-day training seminars in various jurisdictions to test and refine these concepts, gaining supporters along the way. A key to our success was to ensure that every meeting and every training was both inter-agency and inter-disciplinary. We dialed in common terminology and built on existing practices that many key agencies already used. We discovered and dealt with points of friction and uncertainty as we increased the complexity of our training scenarios using a “crawl-walk-run” progression. We always informed and invited agency executives (and from whom we would later seek their endorsement of the *Protocol* through their signatures).

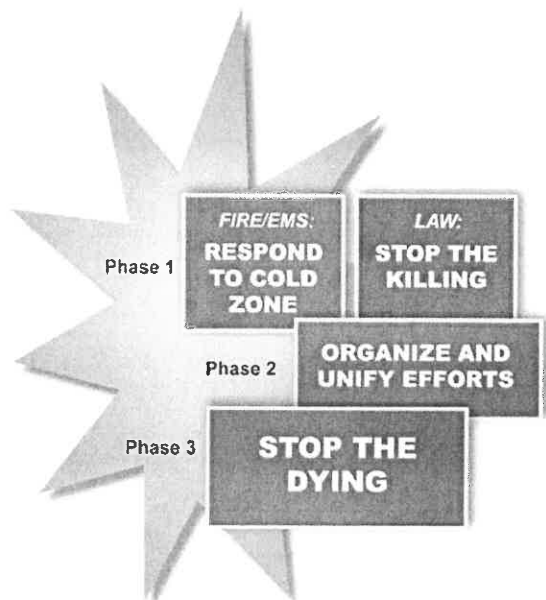
The first Humboldt County CMCI *Protocol* was published in 2019. It is a comprehensive but well-organized 130-page document that addresses a variety of issues for the 69 different agencies involved in the first 4-8 hours of response. The *Protocol* strengthens relationships between EMS, Fire, and Law agencies without creating additional liability or mandated actions. To maximize flexibility and minimize liability, the language of the *Protocol* avoids restrictive words such “shall” or “will” and instead offers suggested approaches and guidelines.

The *Protocol* is not available to the general public, but it is ready for use by anyone in the Humboldt County public safety community. The inside cover quickly directs a user to one of three checklists designed for dispatchers, supervisors, or first responders. The checklist for first-arriving personnel is printed on the bright orange back cover and may be printed separately as a one-page universal “Pocket Guide” carried by all EMS, Fire, and Law responders.

### Innovation

Humboldt County’s approach of publishing only one shared checklist for all three disciplines as part of one comprehensive manual is unique. We are unaware of any other county that has created such a thorough multi-disciplinary manual for so many stakeholders. The *Protocol* covers dozens of concepts, from basics about CMCI’s (which include an attack involving weapons other than firearms, such as for vehicle rammings, edged weapons, and explosives), to important responder vocabulary such as “Hot”, “Warm”, and “Cold” Zones, to the role of the FBI and the establishment of assistance centers for friends and family. Color photographs, diagrams, tables, and organizational diagrams illustrate important information and the same visuals are used in trainings to reinforce the messaging.

One of the visual and conceptual aspects that makes our *Protocol* unique and effective is our own design organizing this complex material into three sections to represent three overlapping phases of an inter-disciplinary response:



A comprehensive protocol with useful visuals is just one piece of the solution. Equally important is the instruction on how to implement this *Protocol* and do so collaboratively. Therefore, the Sheriff's Office is continuing to facilitate collaborative training on the CMCI *Protocol*, which includes full-scale exercise-based scenario training. At these trainings, EMS, Fire, and Law work together on multi-disciplinary teams. Many trainings include a shared mealtime or at least some downtime for members to talk with one another. Not only does this allow each responder to understand their responsibilities during such an incident, it also allows for relationship-building between agency personnel helping cultivate trust, respect, and teamwork between the disciplines, resulting in a more efficient response for the community.

Because of the *Protocol* and our training, we are seeing tangible improvements in day-to-day high-risk responses. Recently, when a fire captain moved his crew towards an accident at the end of a midnight police pursuit, he and the first police officer he encountered used the same language ("Hot Zone?" "Warm Zone?") they had learned together in our *Protocol* introductory classes to clarify the riskiest areas. In a recent barricaded suspect with shots fired, the Law and Fire agencies worked more cooperatively than ever before, sharing a command post and using principles of Unified Command, largely because they had trained together under the CMCI *Protocol*. The Law officer and the Fire leaders communicated effectively, and a Fire department member served as a scribe for the Law officer at the command post.

Additionally, the Sheriff's Office aspires to take this project one step further, uniting one more key player to the response framework: civilian stakeholders. Just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we began including at our meetings and trainings a small number of selected civilian stakeholder 'observers', such as school administrators, private security representatives, and others who may have site responsibility during the first hours of an Active Shooter response. They have quickly grasped our three-phase model, have gained insights about the public safety response, and have left our trainings with a list of important questions to address. We believe that involvement of civilian stakeholders and how they must adapt to dovetail their actions with the CMCI *Protocol* procedures will result in improved internal organization notifications, evacuations and reunions, and other related concerns.

## Results

As a result of this effort, all 69 county first responder agencies have signed the *Protocol* to indicate agreement with its content. Additionally, numerous trainings, ranging from in-class lectures and focused response walk-throughs, to full incident exercises, have been conducted.

Prior to the CMCI *Protocol*, law, fire, and emergency medical services personnel were not on a first name basis. In fact, many did not know the other, despite responding to the same incidents

In regard to the cultivation of inter-disciplinary relationships, Arcata Fire District Battalion Chief Sean Campbell shared that in his 17 years of fire service, he and his co-workers didn't "get to know" their law enforcement partners. "Now, there's a whole different level of trust, respect

and teamwork between us,” Campbell said. “Now I know almost every officer that works in our district area by first name. It really makes a big difference.”

Humboldt Bay Fire Captain Bret Banducci says that through this training, staff has “learned that it is imperative that law and fire continue to train together.” He says, “training with mutual partners has helped build relationships throughout the county, identifying how each agency plays a critical role in the overall response from start to finish.”

Additionally, the CMCI *Protocol* and training has brought about more enthusiasm about learning and utilizing the Incident Command System. Every training session has involved aspects of ICS, and there are often moments when an exercise fails because the participants don’t use ICS. After the instructional team critiques such failures and facilitates a demonstration of the correct use of ICS, the subsequent exercises usually succeed and provide a tangible, durable learning lesson that transcends the government on-line training classes. We know we have accomplished something when a veteran Law officer leaves a *Protocol* class saying that they have learned the value of ICS, and we celebrate the day-to-day moments when we see and hear first responders from different agencies use principles of ICS and concepts from the *Protocol* on the street.

Even if we never experience an Active Shooter or other CMCI in Humboldt County, we are beginning to meet the rising expectations of the public by establishing relationships across the EMS-Fire-Law disciplines, and between first responders from different small agencies. With our *Protocol* as a standardized local reference manual and foundation for both response and ongoing training, we are better prepared to work together, no matter what the incident may be.

### Replicability

Though tailored specifically to Humboldt County, the CMCI *Protocol* is available to California first responder agencies for review and adaptation to fit their specific county needs. The principles of relationship-building incorporated into the implementation of the *Protocol* and its instruction are easily replicable with a little work from all involved.

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