

OVERVIEW: Yuba County Health and Human Services (HHS) designed a Disaster Shelter Activation Exercise (DSAE) to test the department's emergency response plans and prepare personnel to respond effectively and efficiently to a disaster.

CHALLENGE: Yuba County, as with most of California, has been experiencing noticeable changes in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. The most common natural disasters locally are wildfires and floods. In Yuba County, HHS is responsible for activating, staffing and demobilizing evacuation shelters when requested by the Yuba County Sheriff and the Yuba Office of Emergency Services (OES). When called upon, HHS has over 250 Disaster Service Workers (DSW) to staff an evacuation shelter. Although this is a great resource, diverting staff to disaster response challenges day-to-day HHS operations; and lack of proper training challenges disaster response efforts.

SOLUTION: A Disaster Response Team (DRT) formed in July 2022 to address the challenges faced by outdated disaster response guidance and lack of DSW training. The initial phase focused on generating and revising outdated care/shelter and medical/health policy & procedures and job action sheets. The second phase shifted focus to internal department trainings with a Power Point Presentation (PPT) and hands-on breakout sessions. The PPT gave a general overview of shelter operations (both care/shelter and medical/health) and the roles and responsibilities of DSWs. The breakout sessions provided hands-on experience setting up and taking down cots, donning and doffing personal protective equipment, and shelter registration processes. The third phase built upon the first two phases to develop a DSAE to simulate a real-life evacuation shelter. Upon arrival to the shelter exercise, participants were divided into teams that rotated between the following six stations: Registration, Dormitory, Kids Area, Medical/Health, Wellness (aka Mental Health), and Players (Evacuees). Each station had a Lead assigned to ensure exercise objectives were met. Exercise injects were introduced into exercise play based on real scenarios from past shelter experiences. Partners from various outside agencies participated in

the exercise, including the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), CalOES, Beale Air Force Base, The Salvation Army, and representatives from surrounding counties.

INNOVATION: A functional exercise to this scale is the first of its kind in Yuba County. To ensure full departmental participation across 250 HHS employees, the entire HHS department was closed for six hours aside from child welfare services. The decision to close the department was intended to simulate real event in which a majority of HHS staff could be diverted to disaster response efforts. Incorporating service reduction into the exercise gave HHS the opportunity to evaluate office operations and make adjustments based upon lessons learned. Members of the DRT include the HHS Director, Public Health Officer, Care & Shelter (C&S) Lead, C&S Program Specialist, and the Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) Coordinator who met monthly throughout the planning process. Collaboration between upper management, disaster response and emergency preparedness proved to be critical in the success of the exercise.

RESULTS: Approximately 250 HHS employees received disaster shelter training. Prior to the DSAE, 61.06% of HHS staff reported they felt nervous, anxious and hesitant to respond to an emergency due to lack of experience. Following the exercise 90.84% of staff reported they are better prepared to respond to an emergency and 91.54% believed the stations were informative and provided opportunities for hands-on practice.

REPLICABILITY: Yuba County plans to offer the DSAE on a bi-annual basis going forward. State and local government, community partners and non-profits alike can replicate our DSAE to ensure their staff are prepared for disaster response. Extreme weather conditions exist throughout California; and being prepared lessens the impact, especially among vulnerable populations.

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ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:

[Disaster Response Shelter Training Links FINAL - Google Docs](#)