



McChrystal After-Action Report: Alerts, Warnings and Evacuations

Highlights of Findings and Recommendations

September 25, 2025

Here are major findings and recommendations from McChrystal Group's independent after-action review of alerts and evacuations during the January wildfires.

Among the report's findings:

- County policies and protocols on evacuation warnings and orders are outdated, unclear and contradictory, and do not clearly spell out roles and responsibilities for issuing the directives.
- Staffing shortages and resource constraints created challenges, including an under-resourced Office of Emergency Management operating with a staffing level "fundamentally inadequate for Los Angeles County's complex emergency management needs." The report also cited a high number of Sheriff's deputy vacancies, a shortage of patrol vehicles and a 38-year-old Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system.
- First responders and incident commanders were unable to consistently share real-time information due to unreliable cellular connectivity, inconsistent field reporting methods, and the use of various unconnected platforms.

Specifically related to alerts and warnings, the report found that:

- The reasons why some residents did not receive any alerts "may have been the limited cellular coverage in the Santa Monica Mountains and San Gabriel Mountains, [public safety power shutoffs] shutting down the power of commercial cell towers that would have transmitted the messages, downed power lines, or signal strength degradation due to heavy smoke from the fires."
- "The extreme and rapidly moving fire conditions challenged the situational awareness of fire and law enforcement first responders, making it difficult to communicate the fire's location to the public. This was especially prevalent during the Eaton Fire, when wind conditions grounded aerial resources, including surveillance, almost immediately after the fire started."
- There was a clear gap in the transition between the previously used alert and notification system, CodeRED, and the new system, Genasys ALERT, although it did not appear to cause significant issues during the fires. The report recommended more training and changes in the system to simplify coordination of alerts.

The After-Action Report includes multiple recommendations to improve communication, coordination and collaboration across departments, agencies and jurisdictions in five key areas. These recommendations include:

- Updating policies and County Code to ensure that first responders and emergency management clearly understand roles and responsibilities related to making decisions to issue evacuation warnings and orders
- Restructuring the Office of Emergency Management and increasing staffing to a more robust level comparable to other large US city and county emergency management organizations
- Standardizing and enhancing preparedness and evacuation-specific training for all County departments and partners
- Updating obsolete systems and technology to enable all emergency response communications to leverage the Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communications System known as LA-RICS. The report also suggests improvements such as implementing field-accessible mobile dashboards and notes that “access to reliable satellite data and internet connectivity would allow for more consistent communications and ability to share information in future responses.”
- Developing a robust and consistent public education campaign across the County to increase public awareness of zone-based evacuation protocols and alert systems

Below is a summary table of the key gaps, supporting data and observations, and recommendations for improvement:

Critical Focus Area	Summary
1. Policies, Protocols, Standard Operating Procedures, and Authority	The County has conflicting and outdated policies, protocols, and SOPs regarding who has what authority in the evacuation decision-making and implementation process, except for evacuation alerting protocols. This has led to inconsistencies in preparedness strategies across the County and a lack of clear documentation and communication processes. In terms of pre-incident preparedness notifications and evacuation messages to the public, the County should further define and clarify the applicable roles.
2. Training and Planning Coordination	The County’s emergency response training can be improved to boost overall readiness and effectiveness. Establishing a structured

	<p>training program for law enforcement will enhance coordination during fire incidents and evacuations, as well as improve traffic control strategies. Addressing these issues through a solid cross-training initiative, formal staffing guidelines, and enhanced teamwork will strengthen the County's emergency response abilities</p>
3. Resource Management	<p>The catastrophic nature of the Palisades and Eaton Fires would have strained even fully staffed departments operating at peak capacity. However, responding agencies entered this crisis already facing staffing shortages and resource constraints. These pre-existing deficiencies, including personnel gaps in critical positions, aging equipment, and stretched operational budgets, were immediately magnified when the event's scale and complexity demanded resources far beyond standard operational requirements. What were previously manageable departmental challenges became limiting factors in the emergency response, stressing deployment capabilities, sustained operations, and effectiveness throughout the incident timeline</p>
4. Situational Awareness and Interoperability	<p>Situational awareness and interoperability are pivotal areas requiring immediate enhancement. The lack of streamlined coordination tools and common systems among County agencies, coupled with gaps in existing antiquated systems, impacted the ability to monitor the unfolding events and ensure unified efforts across all operational levels to issue alerts and execute evacuations.</p>
5. Community Engagement and Public Information	<p>Effective community engagement and public information strategies are essential for fostering trust, ensuring clarity, and enhancing preparedness in emergency situations. The County must focus on revising policies and procedures related to messaging the public while simultaneously addressing gaps in proactive communication efforts. Streamlined processes, coupled with innovative tools for situational awareness, will</p>

	empower responders and residents to act decisively during critical incidents. A cohesive framework for public outreach and education that is built in collaboration with local and state partner agencies will strengthen resilience and bolster the County's ability to respond effectively to emergencies
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