



ERIC GARCETTI
MAYOR

Date June 22, 2020

To: Honorable Members of the City Council Public Safety Committee

From: Rob Freeman, Assistant General Manager
Emergency Management Department

RE: COVID-19 IMPACTS TO WILDFIRE SHELTER OPERATIONS

Overview

The Emergency Management Department (EMD) provides the following report regarding the potential impacts of the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic to public shelter operations during a concurrent wildfire event. This report is in response to the motion by Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez, Chair of the City Council Public Safety Committee, which was issued on April 22, 2020. EMD has worked with the Department of Recreation and Parks and other mass care stakeholder agencies to assess the potential impacts and provide recommendations for how best to address them as directed.

Background

On March 3, 2020, EMD activated the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in order to coordinate response to the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic. In order to support COVID-19 related needs of persons experiencing homelessness (PEH), twenty-four Department of Recreation and Parks Recreation Centers have been activated as PEH shelters in coordination with the Mayor's Office and the City's Unified Homelessness Response Center (UHRC). This activation has reduced the total number of Recreation Centers that are available for use as traditional Evacuation Centers or Public Shelters.

Additionally, in order to comply with COVID-19 related social distancing restrictions issued by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) and per Mayoral Directive to all City departments, the Department of Recreation and Parks has had to limit the capacity permitted for shelter operations in their facilities to 30 percent of normal operations. This has significantly reduced the scope of potential shelter operations for a concurrent emergency event such as a wildfire that would require evacuations and public sheltering.

Findings

Recreation and Parks has advised that they currently have a total of 51 facilities not designated as shelters for PEH which are available for use as traditional Evacuation Centers or Public Shelters. Factoring in COVID-19 related social distancing requirements, they estimate a total combined shelter bed capacity of 2,086. For the Valley Bureau only they have identified 14 available non PEH sites with an estimated capacity of 546 beds. The Valley Bureau typically has the highest risk of wildfires as recent events have proven (La Tuna, Creek, Saddleridge).

Recreation and Parks serves as the City's lead for Mass Care and Shelter and works closely with other stakeholder and partner agencies such as the American Red Cross (ARC), the Los Angeles Unified

School District (LAUSD), the Department of Animal Services, the Department on Disability and the UHRC. These agencies were also consulted in order to address COVID-19 related impacts on shelter operations.

LAUSD has advised that due to the current COVID-19 related closure of their campuses, they have available school sites that could serve as traditional Public Shelters during a secondary concurrent event such as a wildfire. Availability would be subject to limitations due to the ongoing Grab and Go Food distribution program at some of their sites. Any use of available LAUSD sites would also be subject to COVID-19 related social distancing requirements as is the case with Recreation and Parks facilities. This would reduce site capacity but in general, middle and high school campuses offer more capacity and support capabilities such as showers, restrooms and dining areas compared to Recreation and Parks facilities.

ARC has advised that they have the capability to provide site managers for traditional Evacuation Centers or Public Shelters at either Recreation and Parks or LAUSD sites. Additionally, they have recommended and can coordinate use of available local hotels and Community College campuses to serve as shelter sites. ARC has established memoranda of understanding with the City, LAUSD and the Community Colleges regarding shelter operations that would be put into action during a wildfire event.

The Department of Animal Services has advised that they have the capability to coordinate animal evacuations and sheltering per established City and department plans. This includes equestrian evacuations. Some of their animal care and control facilities are presently closed due to COVID-19 related concerns but this has not decreased their ability to coordinate services during a concurrent secondary event such as a wildfire.

The Department on Disability has advised that they have the capacity to coordinate accessibility of shelter operations for persons with disabilities or others with access and functional needs during a concurrent secondary event.

Although currently activated for the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic, the EOC has the capacity to manage and support response to a concurrent secondary event such as a wildfire. On May 7, 2020, the EOC conducted a brush fire table top exercise as part of its Advance Planning procedures to test our ability to manage a concurrent event. The exercise demonstrated our ability to manage two events from the same EOC location with the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) serving as the lead agency for a wildfire, supported by Deputy Directors from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and EMD, and policy advisors from the Mayor's Office of Public Safety (MOPS). LAFD reported that Fire Service mutual aid resources are available even with COVID-19 activities in the region. LAPD also reported they have the capacity to assist in managing a concurrent wildfire event specifically in the area of evacuation support and security. An After Action Report is being developed for this exercise and EMD will provide a copy of the report to this committee.

Recommendations

Based on the input EMD received from stakeholder agencies we make the following recommendations regarding shelter operations during a wildfire concurrent with the COVID-19 response and EOC activation.

1. The current EOC activation would coordinate and support response to both the COVID-19 event and a wildfire. LAFD will serve as the lead EOC agency for the wildfire with management support from LAPD, LADOT and EMD.
2. As needed, the EOC will move to a 24/7 operation with A and B Watch Operational Periods (0600-1800 and 1800 to 0600 daily).
3. The current EOC Mass Care Branch will be fully activated to include Unit Leaders for ARC, LAUSD, Animal Services, and Functional Needs Support Services (Department of Disability) under the direction of the Department of Recreation and Parks
4. LAFD, LAPD, EMD and LADOT will coordinate evacuation orders, instructions, routes and emergency mass notification through NotifyLA (including Wireless Emergency Alert)

5. The EOC Mass Care Branch will develop a wildfire Mass Care/Public Shelter plan, separate from but concurrent with ongoing COVID-19 related shelter operations.
6. The wildfire Mass Care Plan would establish shelter operations to meet the needs of the incident with the following prioritization of available shelter sites:
 - a. Local hotels as coordinated by ARC
 - b. LAUSD campuses
 - c. Local community colleges
 - d. Recreation and Parks Department facilities
7. ARC will provide shelter managers to supervise operations at all established shelters
8. Any use of LAUSD campuses as shelter sites will be coordinated with the LAUSD Unit Leader and their agency emergency management staff in conjunction with the LAUSD ARC established memoranda of understanding.
9. Any use of community college sites will be coordinated through ARC in accordance with their established memoranda of understanding.
10. Any and all established shelter sites must conform to social distancing, sanitizing, and capacity requirements as established by LACDPH
11. All shelter operations logistical needs will be support by the EOC Logistics Section and Operations Section Resource Status Unit Leader using established ordering procedures.
12. All costs associated with wildfire shelter operations will be tracked separately from those related to the COVID-19 activation but documenting any costs directly associated with COVID-19 social distancing compliance requirements.
13. The Department of Animal Services will coordinate animal shelter operations including equestrian evacuations.
14. The Department on Disability will ensure accessibility and accommodation for persons with disabilities or others with access and functional needs for all shelter operations,
15. As needed, the City's Disaster Service Worker Program (DSW) will be used to provide additional shelter support staff

Conclusion

Based on the information EMD received from Recreation and Parks and the other stakeholder partner mass care agencies, we are confident that the City can manage public shelter operations for a wildfire event concurrent with the COVID-19 response and recovery process. We have the capacity and capability to manage both events through the EOC; the challenge will be to leverage all available mass care resources and manage them consistent with current public health restrictions and requirements.

EMD is available to answer any questions or concerns the committee may have. Please contact me at 213 484-4804 or rob.freeman@lacity.org.

Sincerely,



Rob Freeman
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