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## LESSON LEARNED

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### Shelter-in-Place and Evacuation: Developing Standard Press Release Language for Shelter-in-Place and Evacuation Messages

#### SUMMARY

Public information officers (PIOs) should consider developing standard press release language for when the public is ordered to shelter-in-place or evacuate. This can help ensure that joint information center (JIC) personnel communicate accurate information to the public.

#### DESCRIPTION

The California Governor's Office of Homeland Security Exercise Branch conducted the California Golden Guardian 2010 Statewide Full-Scale Exercise (FSE) in May 2010. This FSE was the sixth statewide homeland security and disaster preparedness exercise in the governor's annual Golden Guardian Exercise series. The exercise was conducted at 7 different venues and involved more than 3,000 Federal, state, local, and private sector participants. The FSE scenario included terrorist attacks at the ports of San Diego, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland, Redwood City, and Sacramento as well as at the California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) campus.

The California Governor's Office of Homeland Security Exercise Branch sponsored the California Statewide Golden Guardian FSE conducted by the County of San Diego on May 18, 2010. Participants included 1,200 representatives from Federal, state, county, and local agencies; 22 healthcare centers; and the military. The purpose of the FSE

was to test the ability of response agencies in the County of San Diego to respond to multiple simultaneous terrorist attacks. The exercise scenario included three suspicious backpacks placed at public transit locations, a residential structure fire in the city of Coronado, and an active shooter incident and detonation of a radiological dispersal device on the CSUSM campus. One of the objectives of the FSE was to demonstrate effective communication of shelter-in-place instructions and evacuation orders to the citizens of San Diego and the surrounding area.

The County of San Diego encompasses more than 4,199 square miles and is home to 3 million people. The county shares an international border with Mexico; 100 languages are spoken throughout the county.

During the FSE, the San Diego County JIC issued press releases at 10:30 a.m., 10:45 a.m., and 10:55 a.m. instructing all county residents to shelter-in-place as a protective action for the radiological release. However, the additional threat of an improvised explosive device or underwater mine from a small vessel led emergency personnel to evacuate a cruise ship in the Port of San Diego. At the time, emergency personnel estimated that this threat posed a greater risk to individuals in the San Diego Harbor than the radiological release. Therefore, at 10:30 a.m., the City of San Diego used WebEOC message boards to designate Qualcomm Stadium as an open-air evacuation center for individuals evacuating from the port. Public

safety agencies had access to this evacuation information on WebEOC and would have implemented these evacuation procedures during a real event. These evacuation activities from the San Diego Harbor would have conflicted with the JIC's press releases instructing all county residents to shelter-in-place.

Qualcomm Stadium is owned and operated by the City of San Diego. The stadium has a seating capacity of 70,561 and is located just outside of downtown San Diego.

The FSE after-action report (AAR) notes that these conflicting messages could have led to confusion during an incident. The AAR recommends that PIOs develop and implement press release language to clearly detail whether residents should shelter-in-place or evacuate.

PIOs should consider developing standard press release language for when the public is ordered to shelter-in-place or evacuate. This can help ensure that JIC personnel communicate accurate information to the public.

### CITATION

County of San Diego, California. *Golden Guardian 2010 County of San Diego Full-Scale Exercise After Action Report*. 16 Jul 2010.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=44959>

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