

# **EMERGENCY...WHAT EMERGENCY?**

## **A Grand Jury Report on Airports in Mendocino County**

September 10, 2008

### ***Summary***

Are the Mendocino County public airports set up with adequate supplies and services in case of a major disaster (fire, earthquake, flood)? **NO!!!** Are the airports included in the Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) for the County? **NO!!!** Are the airports set up with adequate substitute power when the electricity goes out during one of these events? **NO!!!**

The 2007-2008 Grand Jury elected to do an overview of the five public airports in the County. During interviews many of the interviewees asked, "Why are you looking at the airports?" There seemed to be no awareness of what services the airports could provide during a disaster – hangers or containers for storing emergency supplies, facilities for people to be temporarily housed, helicopters for evacuating injured people and moving supplies to other locations. What happens when the power goes out in a large area of Ukiah or the coastal towns – are there back-up generators to support the necessary services? Are the airport and emergency services support personnel properly trained and prepared for airport emergencies?

To answer these questions, the Grand Jury looked at the five public airports in the County to examine their preparedness because the County will eventually face a disaster or local airport emergency. The people of Mendocino County should be asking the question: What are the services available and what can we do to be prepared in the event of a major disaster?

### ***Methods***

The Grand Jury:

- viewed the physical facilities of the five public airports;
- examined the existing emergency plans;
- interviewed persons who were aware of the functions and capabilities of the airports;
- interviewed adjacent fire department Chiefs;
- interviewed the Mendocino County Sheriff's Department employees;
- interviewed Mendocino County Emergency Services Coordinator.

### ***Background***

Section 7.04.040 of the County Code provides for the establishment of the positions of Director, Asst. Director and Coordinator of Emergency Services for Mendocino County.

Contained in those powers and duties are various responsibilities of disseminating disaster preparedness information and preparing the County for disaster response. The Grand Jury investigated the five public airports in the County for disaster preparedness and how the airports fit into the EOP. Table I shows airport characteristics.

**Table I  
Airport Characteristics**

	1	2	3	4	5
	Boonville	Little River	Round Valley	Ukiah	Willits
<b>A</b> Access Roads	Two	Many	One	Many	One
<b>B</b> Owner	Anderson Valley CSD <sup>1</sup>	County	County	City	City
<b>C</b> Hangars	0	26	7	64	21
<b>D</b> Fuel	None	100LL <sup>2</sup>	100LL	100LL, Jet	100LL
<b>E</b> Water for fires	None	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>F</b> Manager on site	Sometimes	Yes	Caretaker	Yes	Sometimes
<b>G</b> Backup generator	No	No	No	No	No
<b>H</b> Lights	None	Disabled	PCL <sup>3</sup>	PCL	PCL
<b>I</b> Instrument landing	No	No	No	Yes	GPS <sup>4</sup>
<b>J</b> Closest fire station	Half mile	On property	2 miles	Across street	1 mile
<b>K</b> Emergency plan	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>L</b> Emergency supplies	No	EMT, foam	No	First Aid	First Aid
<b>M</b> Testing, drills	No	No	No	Yes	Tabletop
<b>N</b> Security	No	Minor	No	Fence	Minor
<b>O</b> Acreage	35	548	110	160	74
<b>P</b> Runway length, width (feet)	3240x50	5149x150	3670x55	3000x75	4415x150

<b>Table I-- Continued</b>						
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
	<b>Boonville</b>	<b>Little River</b>	<b>Round Valley</b>	<b>Ukiah</b>	<b>Willits</b>	
<b>Q</b>	Runway weight capacity	12,500 <sup>5</sup>	60000, 200000 <sup>6</sup> 400000 <sup>7</sup>	30000	30000	28000
<b>R</b>	Able to handle aircraft incident	Call 911	Call 911	Call 911	Call 911	Call 911
<b>S</b>	Emergency supply containers	No	No	No	No	No
<b>T</b>	Copter landing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>U</b>	CalStar copter base <sup>8</sup>	No	No	No	Yes	No
<b>V</b>	CalFire base <sup>9</sup>	No	No	No	Part of year	No
<b>W</b>	NEMS, SIMS <sup>10</sup> training	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>X</b>	Location of fuel	None	Near Tiedown	Near Entrance	Near Taxiway	Near Taxiway
<b>Y</b>	In EOP	No	No	No	No	No

NOTES:

1. Anderson Valley Community Services District
2. Standard propeller aircraft fuel
3. Pilot controlled lighting
4. Global positioning system, in-cockpit controls only for airport calibrated by FAA
5. Single wheel
6. Dual wheel
7. Dual wheel tandem
8. Medical evacuation
9. Formerly designated California Department of Forestry (CDF)
10. National Emergency Management System(NEMS) Standardized Incident Management System(SIMS)

## **General Findings**

1. The airports are not included in the County EOP.
2. The existing emergency plans are for airport related incidents only and do not include annual training with airport personnel or fire departments.
3. These airports are not staffed on a twenty-four hour basis.
4. There are no back-up generators for power failures at any airport.
5. CalStar, an emergency response company, has facilities at only one airport.
6. The airport managers were unaware of any County EOP involving their airports.
7. Airports are not being considered in the EOP as a location for people to gather and be cared for, or the storage of emergency supplies.
8. Airport managers and emergency personnel consider airports viable portals for the entry of supplies, evacuation, and meeting emergency needs.
9. Airports have no current connection to microwave communications.

## **General Recommendations**

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. Little River and Ukiah airports should have permanent generators installed to meet the emergency needs of the Coast and the Ukiah Valley. (Findings 4, Table: Column 2 Row G and Column 4 Row G)
2. Fire departments adjacent to all public airports should train for handling airplane crash emergencies at the airport annually. (Finding 2, Table: 1-5J, 1-5M, 1-5R)
3. County Emergency Services Coordinator should meet with managers of all airports to coordinate their inclusion in the EOP. (Finding 1, 7, 8, Table: 1-5K, 1-5Y)
4. All airports should have access to the new county-wide microwave system being installed. (Finding 9)

## **Required Responses**

Mendocino County Emergency Services Coordinator (All Findings, All Recommendations)

Mendocino County CEO (All Findings, All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Sheriff's Office (Table: 1-5K, 1-5M, 1-5L, 1-5W, 1-5Y, All General Findings, All General Recommendations)

## **UKIAH REGIONAL AIRPORT**

### **Background**

Ukiah Regional Airport is located on South State Street in Ukiah. CalStar is on site 24/7. Aircraft can land in most weather conditions. It is the busiest airport in the County.

## ***Findings***

1. The Ukiah Airport is unprepared to handle any disasters other than aircraft related incidents.
2. The Ukiah Airport has limited management staff. Third in line of responsibility is the clean-up crew.
3. There is no back-up generator available for power failures.
4. The airport is secured by a fence surrounding the property. The vehicle gates are locked and accessible with pass keys; the pedestrian gates are open.
5. CalStar leases space at the airport for administration and for responding to emergency calls..
6. The airport management is not aware of any county-wide emergency plans that involve the airport.
7. There are approximately 10 acres available for use as a staging ground during disasters.
8. There are 87 aircraft housed at the airport. These include CalStar, FedEx, other commercial entities, and private aircraft that rent space at the airport.
9. CalFire stations aircraft and other firefighting equipment at the airport during high fire periods.
10. There are 64 closable rented hangars that could be used in case of an emergency.

## ***Recommendations***

See General Recommendation 1.

See General Recommendation 4.

## ***Required Responses***

Ukiah Valley Fire District Chief (Table: 4J, 4L, 4M, 4R, 4W, 4Y)

Ukiah Regional Airport Manager (All Column 4 Table Findings, All Findings and Recommendations)

## ***Requested Responses***

Ukiah City Fire Department Chief (Table: 4K, 4L, 4M, 4W, 4Y)

Ukiah City Manager (All Column 4 Table Findings, All Findings and Recommendations)

## **LITTLE RIVER AIRPORT**

### ***Background***

Located about two miles east of Coast Highway 1 on Little River Airport Road, the Little

River Airport is the largest in the County. It was built during World War II as a Navy air base, and given to the County after the war. At that time, the surrounding population was less dense than now. The property is extensive, beyond the runway and fixtures, and includes timberland, pigmy forest and other open space.

### ***Findings***

1. It can handle heavier and larger aircraft than any other airport in the County.
2. It has an airport weather observation station (SuperAWOS), which transmits local weather conditions to aircraft.
3. A resident manager lives on the property and has for eight years. He is a retired firefighter and an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), and has EMT equipment with him at all times.
4. One of the Albion-Little River Fire District firehouses is on the property, about a quarter mile from the runway.
5. There are several ways to reach the airport from Highway 1 and Highway 101.
6. Fog closes the airport for part of a day on an average of 100 days each year.
7. Late in 2007, the 60+ year old runway lighting system failed. Plans for replacement are underway. Estimated cost to replace and upgrade the system is \$500,000. The Board of Supervisors approved the project. Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) will provide 90% of the funding.
8. There is no written plan or procedures in case of a crash or other incident at, or near the airport. The manager would be the first responder; his expected first action would be to call 911.
9. There has been no training for an emergency incident at the airport for several years.
10. In a disaster, the airport could be used for major evacuation of people and as a major portal for supplies.
11. There is enough space to set up facilities to temporarily handle the entire population of the surrounding area.
12. Schools, public buildings and other facilities, with on-site toilets, kitchens and, perhaps showers, would be more likely choices than the airport for caring for people during emergency situations.

### ***Recommendations***

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. Runway lighting be replaced. (Finding 7, Table 2H)
2. Instrument landing by Global Positioning System (GPS) be established. (Finding Table 2I)
3. See General Recommendation 1
4. See General Recommendation 4

## ***Required Responses***

Mendocino County Deputy Director Department of Transportation (Table: 2A-Y, Findings 1-12) (Recommendations 1-4)

### **WILLITS AIRPORT**

#### ***Background***

The Willits Airport is located approximately three miles northwest of the City of Willits, off of Sherwood Road. The Airport Manager reports directly to the City Manager. The Airport Manager checks on the airport facilities and oversees the budget and other paperwork concerning the airport. The airport can only handle small planes, helicopters, turbo prop planes and some jets.

#### ***Findings***

1. The Airport Emergency Incident Plan (AEIP) is under supervision of officials of the City of Willits; the Willits Airport is not included in the EOP. At the end of 2007, the Emergency Disaster Plan for the City of Willits was updated and finalized.
2. The AEIP only covers the operation of the airport in case of an aircraft emergency incident. This plan consists of one page and is posted throughout the airport facilities. It is coordinated with the Willits Police Department (WPD), Little Lake Fire Department (LLFD), CalFire, Mendocino County Sheriff Office, Brooktrails Fire Department (BFD), and the FAA. The plan calls for an Incident Command System; the first responder is the Incident Commander.
3. BFD, being the closest facility for emergencies, is usually the first responder. It has a foam truck, a medical unit, the local Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) supplies, and all employees have been SIMS and NEMS trained.
4. At the Willits Airport there are few emergency supplies:
  - a. no foam,
  - b. no major medical supplies, only a small first aid kit,
  - c. some fire extinguishers on site.
5. In case if a major emergency in the Brooktrails area, the airport is designated as an assembly point for local residents, as described in BFD documentation.
6. Communications at the airport are limited to:
  - a. 911,
  - b. cell phones,
  - c. landline phones,
  - d. county-wide police and fire, shortwave band radios.
7. There are some small hand-held radios and a small transmitter in the airport tower for emergency communications in the immediate vicinity.
8. The LLFD, BFD and CalFire participated in a Table Top exercise testing the effectiveness of the AEIP in place in 2006-2007.

### ***Recommendations***

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. A yearly test of the AEIP should be performed using the equipment available to each participating agency on the airport premises. (Table 5N)
2. Make available sufficient emergency supplies to handle the AEIP on airport premises. (Finding 4, Table: 5L, 5S)
3. See General Recommendation 4

### ***Required Responses***

Willits Airport Manager (Table: 5A-Y, Findings 1-8) (Recommendations 1-3)

Willits City Manager (Table: 5A-Y, Findings 1-8) (Recommendations 1-3)

### ***Requested Responses***

Little Lake Fire Department Chief (Table: 5A, 5K, 5L, 5M, 5R, 5W, and 5Y, Finding 2, 6-8: Recommendations 1-3)

Brooktrails Fire Department Chief (Table: 5A, 5J, 5K, 5L, 5M, 5R, 5W, 5Y, Findings 2-8; Recommendations 1-3)



## The Grand Jury Report Process

The role of the Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury is to oversee and shed light on local and County government. Jurors conduct oversight inquiries and investigate matters of public interest. Any individual can file a complaint with the Grand Jury using forms available online at [www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury).

A Grand Jury inquiry begins when a topic is approved by a minimum of 12 of the 19 seated Jurors. A committee then undertakes extensive research and drafts the report. Findings are verified against documents and interview notes and are reviewed for accuracy with key individuals in the agency of interest. The draft is then reviewed by an internal Edit committee and must receive approval by the Full Panel. It is then sent to County Counsel and to the Presiding Judge for final review before public release.

## Members of the 2007/2008 Grand Jury

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Nancy Kleiber  
Lois Lockart  
Chas Moser  
George Pacheco  
Lillian Pacini  
Carolyn Pavlovic  
Barbara Reed  
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James Schweig  
Dennis Scoles  
Bill Stambaugh  
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Finley Williams

### Partial Year

Thomas Clay, Al Pierce, Brent Rusert, Pamela Shilling, Thelma Thompson



*The cover photo for this report was taken at Point Cabrillo Light Station Historic Park by Donald F. Roberts. This report was produced with the generous assistance of Tony and Maureen Eppstein. Information on Point Cabrillo State Historic Park and the Lighthouse Inn is available at [www.pointcabrillo.org](http://www.pointcabrillo.org)*