

ASBPPE MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR  
2012-2013

# EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

STRATEGY AND LEADERSHIP IN CRITICAL TIMES

MARCH/APRIL 2014



APPS FOR  
EVERYTHING

REBUILDING  
JOPLIN'S SCHOOLS

# ON GUARD

STAYING  
AHEAD OF  
THE GAME IN  
CALIFORNIA

Mark Ghilarducci,  
Director, Office of  
Emergency Services,  
California



# A Balancing Act

How California's Mark Ghilarducci stays in front of a host of threats.

*As director of the California Office of Emergency Services, Mark Ghilarducci uses every bit of his 30 years of diverse service in the public and private sectors, working in emergency services, fire and rescue and homeland security.*

*He is charged with keeping California up to speed on a host of threats, including earthquakes, floods, mudslides, wildfires, terrorism and other issues, including — of course — drought. The state is in its third year of drought as fire season approaches. Ghilarducci talks about how he keeps California abreast of the various risks and hazards.*

By Jim McKay | Editor

⊕ Of course we first have to address the drought. From an emergency management perspective, how do we mitigate these circumstances?

The drought is one of these evolving situations. Unlike a fire that smokes or some sort of infrastructure damage, where you can see the damage and have a tangible sense of what it means, this is one of those situations that unless you do something about it proactively when it's on you, when it becomes a public health and safety crisis, it's too late.

Drought, particularly one at this level, has an impact on every sector we deal with. Whether it's transportation or education, food and agriculture, water supply, health and medical — all of these different sectors can be impacted. My role as the state's emergency manager is to coordinate all of the various agencies that have a responsibility and then do the advance planning to anticipate those vulnerable communities or issues that are going to rise up. We then put countermeasures in place so the disaster doesn't get out in front of us.

With the dry conditions, we're already in fire season. We've had to staff up three months beforehand and so that's another emergency management public safety concern. One of the governor's directions was to do early seasonal call-back for our [California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection] firefighters. Our strategy has been to be very aggressive in initial attack, get on fires fast and keep them as small as possible.

⊕ Let's switch gears and talk about earthquakes. We had a swarm of them in Southern California in 2012. Describe that scenario, how you reacted and why.

One of the things about earthquake swarms [sequences of localized earthquakes] is what do they really mean. Is it on an active fault or on a seismic gap, an area that hasn't been active for a while? Does it look like the swarm is accelerating and having an impact on structures? I convene the California Earthquake Prediction Evaluation Council, get their scientific interpretation and then based on that, issue an earthquake advisory saying, "We've had this swarm, there is a high probability that we will have more earthquakes as strong as or stronger than the last one you felt, so be prepared."

JESSICA MULLHOLLAND

That's what we did during the Brawley, [Calif., earthquakes in 2012]. The seismologists felt that it was in a critical area and could result in something greater.

**+** How are you preparing for long-term recovery when/if that really big earthquake finally hits?

This is a big deal. It's multifaceted, and the first facet starts way before the earthquake even hits and that's building community resiliency and sustainability. We do that through public education, hazard mitigation programs and having robust plans we exercise. Then, of course, when the earthquake occurs there is a very aggressive response. But the recovery — and I've seen it in many disasters — is really the Achilles' heel. We can respond pretty well, but it's the long-term recovery that is really challenging. We here in California have been looking at restructuring our entire recovery framework. We're taking the National Disaster Recovery Framework, the overarching framework, which is really important that we consider because the federal government is going to be in to help us. But it's not just a government solution. We have engaged the private sector in a significant way, building [memorandums of understanding] with multiple private-sector entities to become part of the solution in rapidly recovering our communities. We think that the mitigation programs and focusing on resiliency before the event and having the private-sector engagement will really help us move forward.

Part of that private-sector engagement is the financial piece and having a pipeline of rapid financial support in catastrophic investment to help these communities get back online. We're really looking at prioritizing what needs to be done, first, second, third, and we really need to do that in close coordination with local government.

**+** How vulnerable is California to a tsunami, and is it prepared?

We've thought quite a bit about it. The one thing about tsunamis and the way you address that is really getting the word out fast and for local coastal communities to have plans to notify the public that lives there and also the public that is visiting, particularly in our beach commu-

nities. Get the word out to move through evacuation routes that are well posted.

We did a significant amount of inundation mapping along all of our coast to help generate the evacuation routes and high points where citizens can go during a tsunami warning. It's an ongoing, ever-evolving thing we need to do. If we see an event coming, we turn that information around rapidly to the 911 centers around the state and the emergency managers and then through the plans, they get that information out by social media or other forms of communication. Through the 911 centers, they notify law enforcement and fire, who can then ensure that evacuation starts.

In some cases, it's just moving to higher ground to protect yourself. But understanding the speed and intensity of tsunami movement and what it could mean is a big factor. And public education is a big part of that.

*"California has a robust emergency management system that we use in our mutual aid supporting county to county, city to city throughout the state every year for all kinds of threats."*

**+** In such a diverse state with so many risks, how do you prioritize risk?

We're constantly re-evaluating our risk matrix in California. We know for the most part that an earthquake is our highest threat, highest-consequence scenario. So really, when you look at the worst-case scenario planning for earthquakes and the way we approach our planning initiatives and exercises around that, it sort of trickles down to all the other threats. You need to tweak a bit; certainly if you've got a human cost threat, an act of terrorism, there are certain intelligence things we need to build into that. We may need some specialized resources to respond. But California has a robust emergency management system that we use in our mutual aid supporting county to county, city to city throughout the state every year for all kinds of threats. It doesn't really matter what the threat is, we use it to expand or contract based upon the incident and we try to re-evaluate this threat matrix each time.

After an earthquake, from there we look at the matrix each year and determine where we would put the greatest amount of resources that we have for planning, preparedness and training.

**+** You mentioned terrorism, and that is never on the back burner, is it?

It can't be. I'm also the homeland security adviser for the state, and terrorism and transnational crime, human trafficking and narcotics trafficking all falls under this office and you have to keep an eye on that. It's an ever-changing threat matrix as well. We have a broad suite of efforts — everything from critical infrastructure protection to our six regional fusion centers as well as our engagement with regional gang task forces and other efforts.

**+** Can you explain your efforts regarding human trafficking?

Human trafficking is becoming a well understood threat in California. We're a border state with Mexico, our highway system is a pipeline to moving people who are being trafficked to the middle of the country through

our highway corridors, whether for narcotics reasons or sex trafficking. We have task forces all around the state that are very tactical that we support and are engaged with. And we're working closely with the U.S. attorney in the various districts in California and our local law enforcement to really focus on this whole human trafficking situation: increased awareness, interdiction and then enforcement.

**+** How often is the EOC active?

Our operation center is always activated, just at different levels depending on the incident. There is enough going on in California all the time — it's so big and complex. We try to adjudicate everything at the lowest level, but our system allows us to expand rapidly. For example with the drought, it's significant, it's statewide, we have the EOC activated at a higher level, we have state agencies engaged and doing their coordination. If we don't have a need to go to out minimum activation level, our fire and rescue division has their own center to get fully engaged and we would support them as necessary; law enforcement has the same thing. **+**

[jmckay@emergencymgmt.com](mailto:jmckay@emergencymgmt.com)