



# Emergency Response and Crisis Communications Training

Board of Directors  
December 9, 2025

# Presenters



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# Agenda

- Training objectives
- Overview of emergency management structure and preparedness
- Messaging in an emergency
- Case study / exercise
- Discussion

# Training Objectives

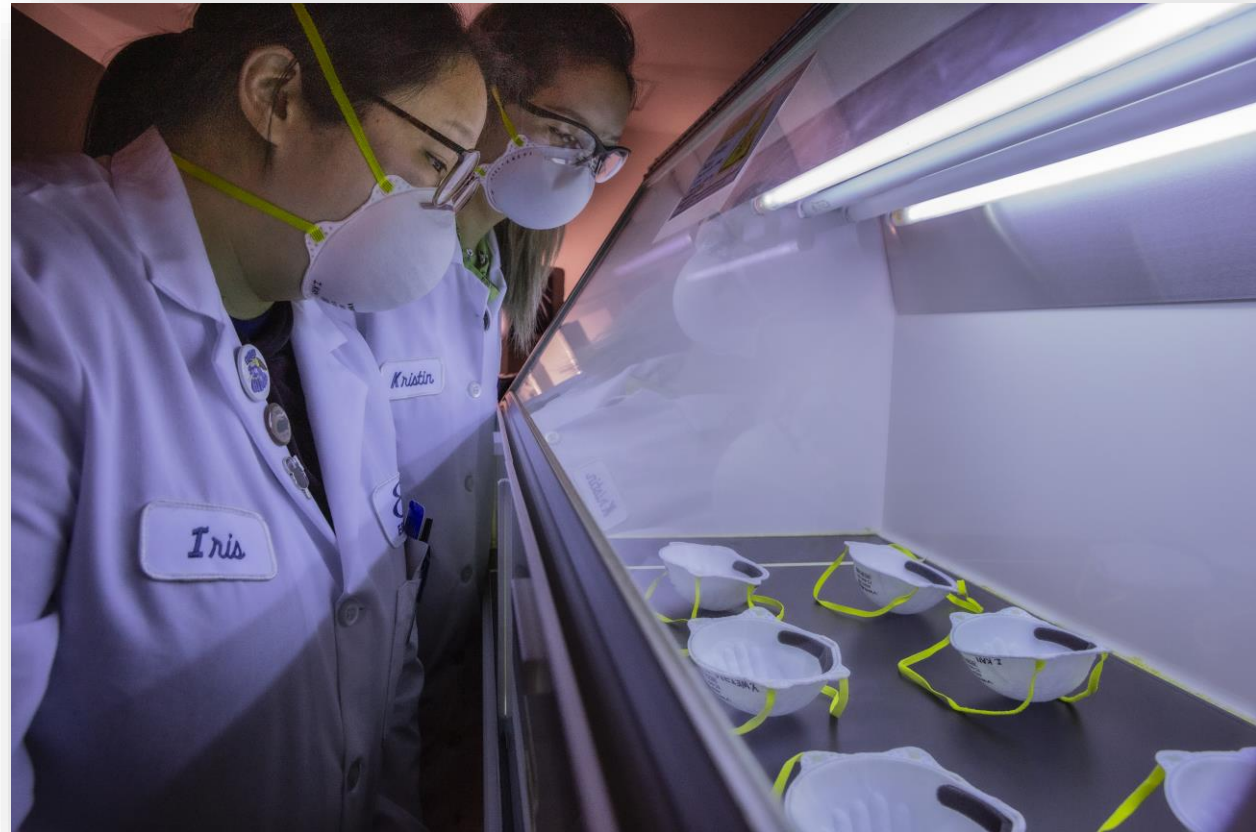
- Understand emergency management structure and District response and recovery plans
- Recognize roles and best practices for communications and outreach during an emergency or crisis
- Gain experience after participating in emergency response exercise

# Overview of Emergency Management System



# Potential Emergencies Involving EBMUD

- Flood / dam failure
- Earthquake
- Pandemic
- Water quality incident
- Terrorism
- Infrastructure failure
- Wildfire or urban fire
- Cyberattack



Staff sanitizes N95 masks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Emergency Management System

Emergency management is structured and standardized through **Incident Command System (ICS)**

- Used by all levels of government, emergency responders, utilities
- Scalable and applicable to emergencies or planned events
- Enables coordinated response among jurisdictions and agencies
- Adopted at federal level through **National Incident Management System** and at state level through the State's **Standardized-Emergency Management System**

# Emergency Management System (continued)

- **ICS** establishes common processes for responding to an emergency including staff organization, job functions, terminology, and communication
- Establishes priority system:
  - Public safety
  - Incident stabilization
  - Protection of property and the environment



The District's mobile command center trailer is equipped to maintain communications.

# District Emergency Preparedness

## **Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)**

Guides response with all hazards plan and functional annexes for various types of emergencies

## **Emergency Operations Team (EOT)**

Staff coordinating incident response and resource support



Staff participate in an EOT exercise.

# District Emergency Preparedness (continued)

- **Training:** regular District-wide exercises, business continuity plans and tests
- **Mutual assistance:** partnerships, training, and agreements



Crews practice installing a temporary bypass during an EOT exercise.

# Mutual Aid / Assistance

- **Mutual assistance** is a type of mutual aid intended to be reimbursed by the requesting party
  - Repair of water distribution system will greatly depend on mutual assistance
  - Authorized by Emergency Operations Director
  - May be reimbursable by state or federal agencies
- **Emergency Operations Team** regularly works with other agencies (e.g., City & County of San Francisco, Los Angeles Department of Water & Power) and various statewide networks to ensure readiness

# EBMUD Activation

In an emergency, EOT will activate immediately to:

- Establish communication
- Conduct inspections, document condition of assets
- Assess workforce availability, determine needed resources



Staff discuss logistics during an EOT exercise.

# EBMUD Early Response Priorities



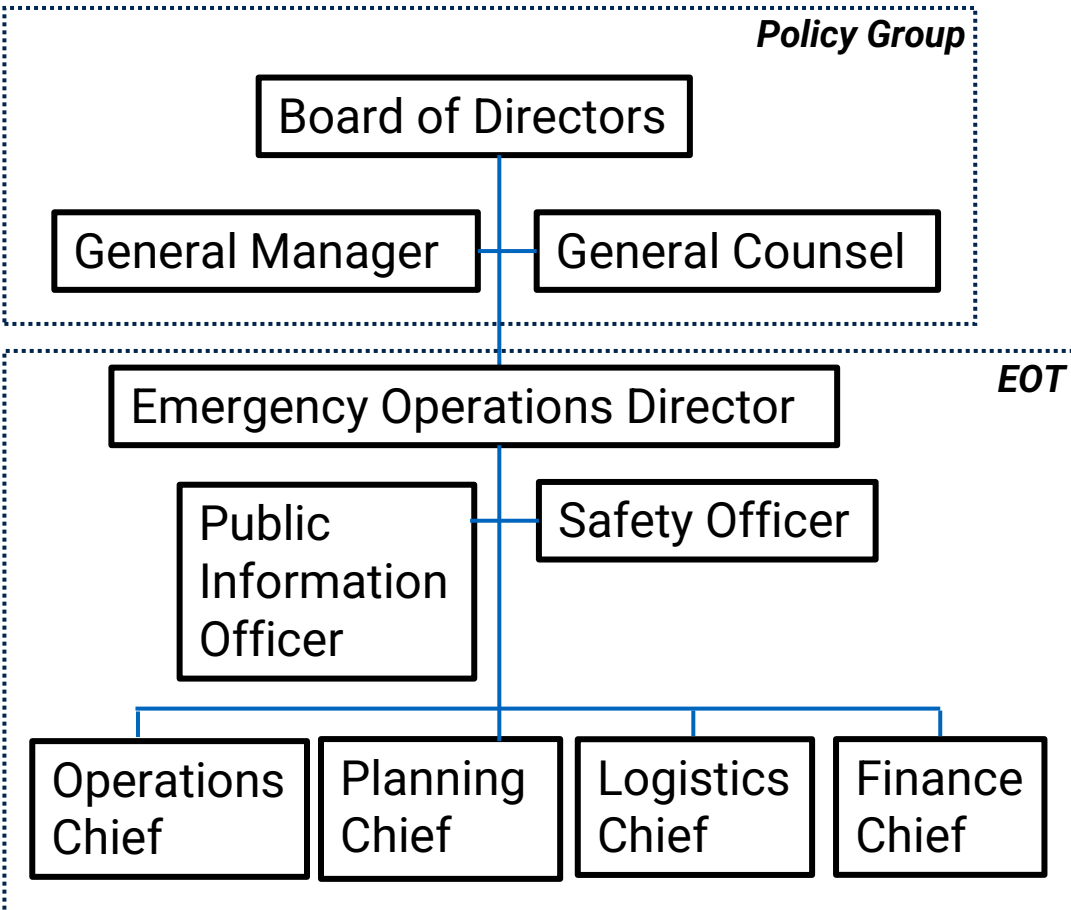
Crews regularly practice and are ready for emergencies.

- Maintain pressure in the distribution system, isolate breaks as needed
- Maintain treatment production of potable water to the extent possible
- Maintain wastewater interceptor conveyance and treatment plant operation

# EBMUD Recovery Priorities

- **Water system:**
  - Restore service to critical customers such as hospitals, mass shelters, refineries, etc.
  - Repair largest pipes first, service connections last except as noted above
- **Wastewater system:**
  - Restore conveyance to Main Wastewater Treatment Plant and/or wet-weather facilities
  - Repair primary, then secondary, then tertiary treatment

# Basic ICS Structure



- **Emergency Operations Director:** Responsible for overall management of EOT and incident response
- **Safety Officer:** Ensures personnel safety
- **Public Information Officer:** Manages public information and outreach
- **Operations Chief:** Executes plan, manages field resources
- **Planning Chief:** Develops plan, analyzes data, produces status reports
- **Logistics Chief:** Manages/procures supplies and materials, support personnel and mutual assistance resources
- **Finance Chief:** Tracks costs and claims, critical for reimbursement

# Policy Group Functions

- Set and review policy
- Ratify emergency declaration, approve contracts
- Communicate District response and recovery plans with other elected officials and constituents
- Provide GM with information from external stakeholders

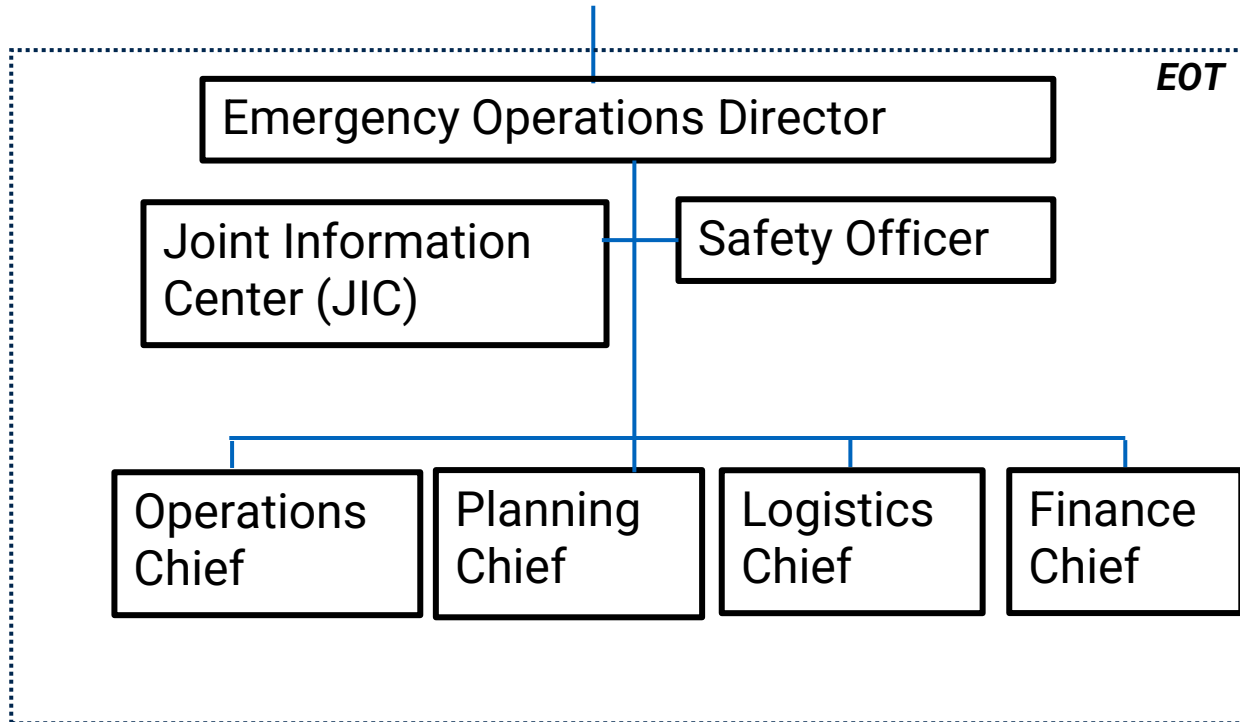
## **Examples:**

- Financial commitments outside of the adopted budget
- Potential support from retirees
- Support for workforce and labor issues related to changed working conditions during recovery phase

# Multi-Jurisdictional Emergencies

## Unified Command:

Cal Office of Emergency Services (OES), County OES, FEMA, County Sheriff, National Guard, State Division of Drinking Water, Local Government



## Unified Command:

- Activated in large scale emergency
- Organizations maintain respective jurisdiction/scope of work
- EBMUD EOT separate and connected through liaison

## Joint Information Center (JIC)

- Activated to ensure timely, accurate and consistent public communication
- Staffed by multiple agencies

# EBMUD Emergency Operations Team

- Activated for any size emergency when rapid and streamlined decision making is needed
- EOT does not need EBMUD emergency declaration to activate
- Larger events require EBMUD emergency declaration to manage

Example	EOT activated	EBMUD Emergency Declaration	Unified Command
Single Main Break			
Large scale loss of PG&E service	✓		
Major Infrastructure Repair	✓	✓	
Large-scale Water Quality Event	✓	✓	State Division of Drinking Water ✓
Major Earthquake	✓	✓	Multiple state/federal agencies ✓

# Emergency Declarations by EBMUD

- Board may declare a District emergency under the MUD Act
- Board has delegated authority to GM or designee, in consultation with Board President or designee, to declare a District emergency
- Used when immediate action is needed to minimize damage, disruption
- Under declaration, GM is authorized to enter into emergency contracts not to exceed \$500,000, per contract, without bids or notice during the emergency response period
- Board shall meet to ratify declaration by GM as soon possible
- Reports must be made to Board regarding contracts/expenditures
- Board shall meet to formally declare an end to emergency

# Board Meetings During Emergency

- Board will continue to hold regular, special, or emergency meetings
- Brown Act remains in effect unless modified by Governor through Executive Order under State disaster declaration
- Alternative meeting locations for Board if Administration Building is unavailable:
  - Orinda Watershed Headquarters
  - City Council Chambers or other locations throughout the service area (Castro Valley, Orinda, Richmond, El Cerrito, Pinole, Walnut Creek, San Leandro, San Ramon)
  - Virtual

# Brown Act Considerations in Emergency

- CESA requires Board to meet “as soon as possible” after declaration of state or local emergency.
- Board may meet entirely remotely during a state or local emergency if, by a majority vote, they determine meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees
- New law requiring remote public meeting access does not apply to emergency meetings
- Brown Act prohibitions on extra-meeting Board member communications remain in effect

# Board Meeting Considerations

Topic	Regular Meeting	Special Meeting	Emergency Meeting
Purpose	Regular, non-emergency, recurring meeting	Called outside regular meeting schedule to address specific business	For emergencies that threatens public health and safety, or severely impacts service
Authority to call a meeting	Set by Board based on adopted schedule	Board president or majority of the Board	Board president or majority of the Board
Noticing requirement	72 hours in advance	24 hours in advance	At least 1 hour in advance.
Authorized discussion topics	Items listed on the agenda plus limited exceptions	Only the item(s) listed on the agenda	Only the emergency or matters necessary to respond to it
Brown Act Quorum & Location Requirements	<b>4/7</b> - at least a quorum must participate from <b>locations within the agency's jurisdiction</b>	<b>4/7</b> - at least a quorum must participate from a <b>single physical location within the agency's jurisdiction</b>	<b>5/7</b> - quorum must participate from a <b>single physical location within the agency's jurisdiction</b> . Agency must hold meeting to determine there is a state of emergency that poses health or safety risk for in-person meetings.

# Activation of Standby Officers

- Standby Officers serve if a Board member is “unavailable” in a state or local emergency
- GM determines if a Board member is unavailable resulting from the emergency
- GM will notify Standby Officers
- At first meeting, Board confirms unavailability of regular members based on the GM’s determination, and will seat Standby Officers

# Communication with the Board

- GM communicates response strategy
- Board receives regular updates on public engagement and key messages:
  - Primarily through the GM or designee
  - Backups are: 1) General Counsel and 2) Finance Director
- Share expectations around speed, cadence, and completeness of information
- Board provides GM with observations, community reports, information from elected officials

**Questions?**





**Break**

15 minutes

# Public Communications in an Emergency



# Why Crisis Communications Training?

**Preparedness is key for:**

- Natural Disasters
- Technological emergencies
- Water/Wastewater system disruptions, accidents
- Legal, human resources issues
- Other critical incidents

# EBMUD Incident Communications

- Emergency Operations Plan includes **Crisis Communications annex** that outlines:
  - Media, community and government outreach
  - Messaging for various situations involving EBMUD (earthquakes, boiled water notices, cyberattacks)
  - Key contacts and stakeholders
  - Staffing of various public information roles

# EBMUD Incident Communications (continued)



# Communications Team Responsibilities

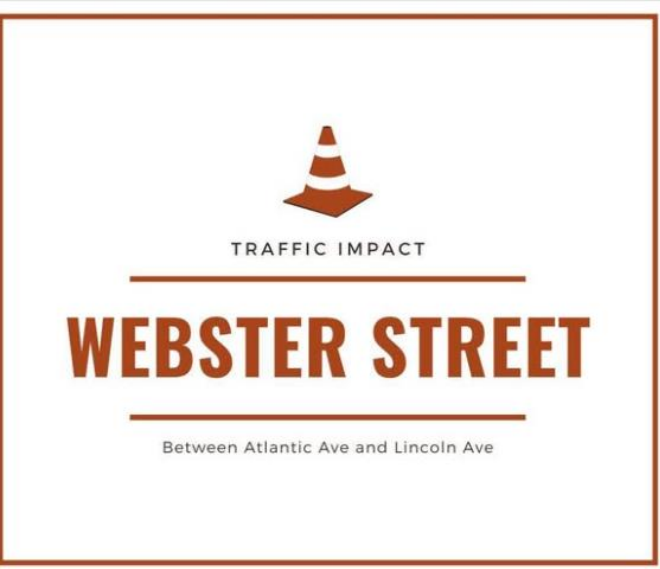
- **Media outreach**
  - Press conferences, news releases
  - Coordination with other agencies
- **Online/social media**
  - FB, X, Nextdoor, Instagram, LinkedIn, homepage



Staff responds to media inquiries.

# Communications Team Responsibilities (continued)

- **Community outreach**
  - Meetings, flyers, door-to-door in case of prolonged events
- **Graphics/visualization**
  - Help distill complex information
- **Government affairs**
  - Coordination with local, state, and federal staff; ensures correct information is disseminated



TRAFFIC IMPACT

# WEBSTER STREET

Between Atlantic Ave and Lincoln Ave




**HIGH FIRE DANGER**

**FIREWORKS ARE PROHIBITED**  
Fireworks are illegal within the EBMUD Service Area.

**PROPERLY DISPOSE OF CIGARETTES**  
It only takes a spark to start a wildfire

**REPORT ANY SIGNS OF SMOKE OR FIRE IMMEDIATELY**



**Alert**


 **East Bay Municipal Utility District** ✓  
EBMUD Public Affairs · 13 Sep

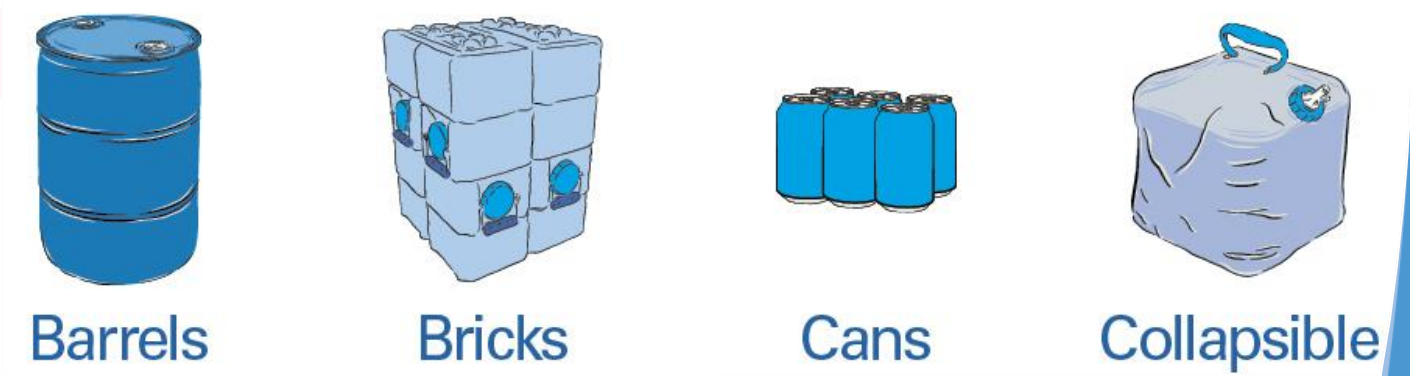
Alert. Hello Everyone,

There is a main break near 45th and Hollis Streets in Emeryville. Water service in the area has been turned off while the repairs are underway. We apologize for the inconvenience.

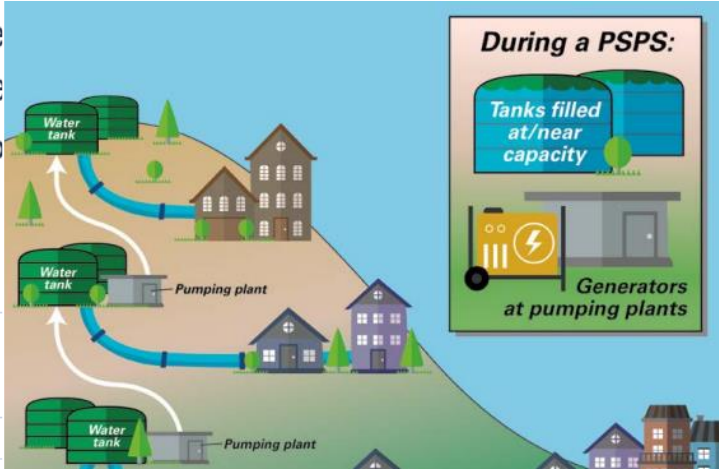
Posted to **Subscribers of East Bay Municipal Utility District** in 1 neighborhood

  · 290 Impressions

 Add a comment...



**Barrels**      **Bricks**      **Cans**      **Collapsible**



**POWER SHUTOFF IN EFFECT**

PG&E has shut down power to parts of the East Bay due to extreme fire danger. Please reduce water use to maintain critical water supplies to emergency responders.

**If you have lost power, EBMUD asks you to conserve water immediately.**

Turn off irrigation

 [Learn more at ebmud.com](http://ebmud.com)


# Major Incident Communications

- Large incident will involve multiple jurisdictions/agencies
- Public Affairs Office staffs Public Information section of EBMUD Emergency Operations Team
- In Unified Command, EBMUD is part of a larger multi-agency response:
  - District public communications likely coordinated through **Joint Information System**
  - Standard in large emergencies (typically includes government agencies, utilities, first responders)

# Joint Information System

- **Coordinated messaging:** Unified messages across different responding agencies/jurisdictions
- **Public Information Plans:** Comprehensive outreach plans for emergency situations
- **Public Trust:** Ensures single, authoritative source of information
- **Rumor Management:** Addresses inaccurate information that could undermine public confidence
- **Location:** Virtual or physical location

# Board Communications

- Support operational priorities by amplifying messages through engagement with:
  - Constituents
  - Community members
  - Elected officials
- Will receive regular updates on key messages and share information with GM
- May be asked for official comment

# Messaging Best Practices in Emergencies

- Clear, consistent, concise, timely, and accurate information
- **Components:**
  - Empathy
  - Responsibility/accountability
  - Transparency
  - Path to resolution
  - Potential calls to action

# Examples of Strong Messages - Earthquake

## EBMUD:

- Activated its emergency operations team
- Staff are assessing critical infrastructure
- Is committed to ensuring the safety of our community and quickly restoring services
- Is working around the clock, coordinating with partner agencies, and will provide updates

# Examples of Strong Messages - Boil Water

Due to major damage to our system, a boil water notice is issued for this area.

- This precaution is necessary to ensure your safety while we work to restore water service
- Boil water for 1 minute past a rolling boil before using it for drinking, cooking or brushing teeth
- Thank you for your patience as we work to restore your water service and quality

# Media Engagement Best Practices

## Do:

- If media calls, get relevant information (deadline, topic, outlet) and share with GM
- It's OK to say "I'll get back to you"
- Keep messages at a high level
  - Display empathy, responsibility, transparency, and commitment to resolution

# Media Engagement Best Practices (continued)

**Don't:**

- Be pushed into an interview/answers you're not comfortable with
- Say 'No Comment'
- Assume anything is off the record
- Guess, speculate, and, of course, never lie

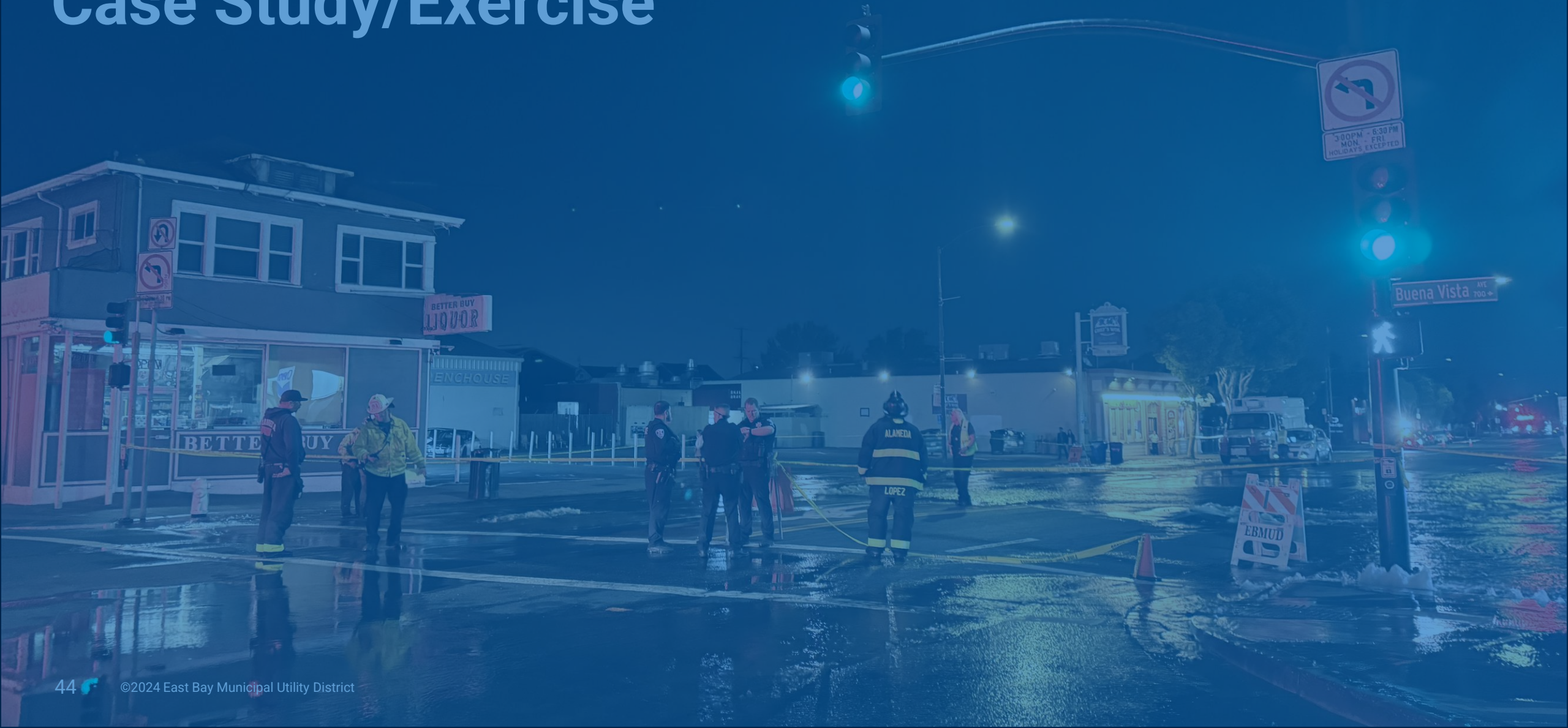
# Examples

- **Gary Southern, Freedom Industries:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAGixCOj8bg>
- [Gavin Newsom Holds First COVID-19 Focused Event In Nearly A Month \(0:10-2:45\)](#)
- ***What worked and didn't in these examples?***

# Questions?



# Case Study/Exercise



# Exercise: 6.0 Earthquake on Hayward Fault

## First ~72 hours (Response Phase):

- GM contacts Board to confirm status, provide update and recommend special or emergency meeting and disaster declaration to broaden resources
- Emergency medical services, fire/police active, EBMUD and utility operations secondary unless directly tied to EMS objective
- Cities, counties likely to immediately declare emergency followed by state of California, federal declarations
- California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) activates regional EOC or statewide operations center

# Exercise: EOT Response Plan

Earthquake occurs at time zero (T)

Time Period	EOT Group	Functions
T + minutes	EOD	EOD contacts GM
T + 2 hours	EOT Command Staff	Organize EOT, establish internal communication, compile system status reports, <b>assess staff availability</b>
T + 2 to 8 hours	Field staff / EOT Operations Staff	Inspect, assess, and transmit status report to EOT for compilation and analysis
T + 2 to 8 hours	EOT Liaisons	Establish communication with neighboring jurisdictions and agencies
T + 8 hours	EOT Planning Group	Complete initial damage/condition assessment documents, establish response priorities, determine mutual aid needs – document in IAP

# Exercise: EOT Response Plan (continued)

Damage Assessment: T + 1 Day

EOT Group	Function
Water Distribution Operators	Continue to verify water system pressures, reservoir storage, power, and communication systems
Water Distribution – Service Yards	Inspect large diameter pipelines
Engineering staff	Continue to inspect dam monitoring equipment and dam integrity – priorities are set by earthquake magnitude and distance to dam
Water Treatment staff	Continue to inspect water treatment plants using checklists
Business groups	Each major business group (e.g., customer service) follows sequenced steps in their respective Business Continuity Plan to recovery operations

# Exercise Goals – Day 0 through Day 3

- Test two-way communication between Board and GM
- Understand guidelines to determine a quorum and discuss activation of Standby Officers
- Test ability to schedule and agendize special/emergency meeting at alternative location
- Understand incident timeline and Board's role throughout

# Exercise: Day 0 through Day 3

## General Manager:

- Contacts Board President and discusses emergency declaration, status of District, and special meeting parameters
- Contacts Board members to schedule special Board meeting

## Factors potentially affecting ability to perform as Board member:

- Ability to communicate
- Personal/family health
- Status of housing
- Location of Board meetings, ability to travel

# Exercise: Day 0 through Day 3 (continued)

- Test communication from GM
- Declare emergency
- Determine timing and location for special/emergency meeting and availability of Board
- Confirm quorum – consider Directors who may be remote
- Develop agenda for special/emergency meeting

## End of exercise

# Exercise: 6.0 Earthquake on Hayward Fault

## Discussion:

- Duration of time before GM contacts a Standby Officer
- Need for Standby Officer(s) if quorum already achieved
- Alternate meeting locations
- Talking points for Board for external communication

# Recap and Next Steps



# Recap of Key Lessons

- Emergency response structure and role of Board
- District priorities for response and recovery
- Coordination with other government agencies for recovery and reimbursement
- Brown Act considerations and use of Standby Officers
- Messaging best practices
- Exercise testing communication and availability

# Next Steps

- Incorporate feedback into emergency response plans and bring updates back to the Board
- Conduct annual exercise with Board
- Provide additional training and resources
  - ICS training
  - AWWA Communications Toolkit

# Questions?

