

**TITLE: No One is as Smart as All of Us**

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*“We need more accurate updates” the pleas were unmistakable. “These briefings are becoming more and more general. Can you provide specific information?” As PG&E outage areas were expanding and stronger winds were forecast, a growing sense of exasperation was clearly discernible in the normally drone-like voices of emergency personnel participating in the non-public operational briefing. The affected communities, along with hospitals, schools, and law enforcement, were demanding accurate information. “How much confidence do you have in the information you are giving us? Can we rely on the maps you just posted?”*

*“We’re doing the best we can” retorted the PG&E Vice President who had recently joined the briefing. “We are having significant technical difficulties. We didn’t anticipate how many agencies would be participating in these operational briefings.” And then the final declaration “We need to terminate this briefing until the next one. Thank you.” Digital tones of the line being abruptly cutoff were audible. My colleague Amy and I sat in stunned silence as we weighed the options in the rapidly unfolding situation.*

Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS), mass regional evacuations, dangerous foothill fires, and school lockdowns. Our communities are watching and making judgements. As public servants, we operate in a fishbowl. And that is exactly the way it should be.

It seems that Yuba County has had its share of challenging and dangerous situations, all impacting our area schools in some form or other. And still, they find ways to improvise, adapt, and overcome (to respectfully borrow the Marine Corps adage).

This is no puff piece about our schools. It’s not about the latest award, educational initiative, or even football games. It’s a stark view of the challenges schools are facing in responding to regional safety threats. Indeed, evolving emergency realities have compelled schools to develop a closer collaboration with the Yuba County Office of Emergency Services (OES). And OES has responded in earnest.

Think about it. Had the alarm for the full-scale Oroville Dam evacuations of a couple of years ago sounded during a regular school day (and not during a sleepy Sunday afternoon), the resultant frantic scramble by parents to get to their children could have produced untold chaos on the roads - and even more catastrophic results had the dam failed.

As the Yuba County Superintendent of Schools (YCOE), I want to extend my respect and appreciation to all our area school districts and superintendents, including our own YCOE staff, for remaining at their duty stations during various regional crises - monitoring emergency

status updates, managing school facilities and bus schedules, and making difficult decisions late into the night regarding school closures. Our collective foresight in planning for regional emergencies should be underscored.

As a result of this collaboration, the Yuba County Superintendent of Schools now has a seat on the County Emergency Response Team capable of providing real-time information and jurisdictional guidance in close communication with school superintendents during regional emergencies. This unique relationship was clearly evident during the recent PG&E outages when we were the only regional educational interest participating in the state-wide PG&E operational briefings.

Similarly, I extend our collective respect and appreciation to Yuba County OES personnel for their proactive approach to keeping the public, and our schools, informed and safe during regional emergencies.

(As a symbolic note of appreciation to our partners at OES, the Yuba County Office of Education recently delivered to their office an ice-cold Dr. Pepper and a bag of Lay's Classic Potato Chips. They also have a healthy sense of humor!)