Water in Trona area is now safe to drink, San Bernardino County says

Shawn Dodson (left), with San Bernardino County Fire, stacks cases of water donated by Vince Burns (right), from Ridgecrest, at San Bernardino County Fire Station 57 Saturday July 6, 2019 in Trona. The area was hit with two major earthquakes since Thursday. (Photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

By BRIAN ROKOS | brokos@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: July 17, 2019 at 5:15 pm | UPDATED: July 17, 2019 at 5:21 pm
Residents of the Trona area no longer have to boil their water for use in cooking or drink bottled water instead of tap water, San Bernardino County officials announced Wednesday, July 17.

The order had been in place since the powerful earthquakes July 4 and July 5 struck the town located on the southwest tip of Death Valley National Park. Searles Domestic Water Co. had to fix leaks in water mains that had allowed dirt to seep into the water supply.

The new phone numbers for customers to contact the water company are 760-382-3776 and 760-382-8553. No past due fees for the water bills will be assessed in July, the county said.

The county also announced Wednesday that the Trona Library would be resuming normal business hours starting Thursday: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday; closed Friday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday; and closed Sunday.

SBCounty @SBCounty

ALERT: the boil water notice has officially been lifted for the Trona Area. It is no longer necessary to boil tap water or to consume bottled water. #earthquake #Trona
The boil water notice has officially been lifted for the Trona Area.

It is no longer necessary to boil tap water or to consume bottled water.

Residents and business owners affected by the quakes can call the county at 877-410-8829 to have questions answered.

The county is providing daily updates on its website.

Tags: Ridgecrest Earthquakes, Top Stories Sun
Deputies fire on SUV in standoff situation

By Martin Estacio
Staff Writer

Posted Jul 17, 2019 at 12:01 AM
Updated Jul 17, 2019 at 9:17 PM

VICTORVILLE — In the third deputy-involved shooting to occur in the Victor Valley in a week, San Bernardino County Sheriff’s deputies opened fire on a man they said drove toward them in his SUV on Wednesday afternoon.

Sheriff’s Department spokesperson Jodi Miller told the Daily Press the shooting occurred after deputies responded at 2:39 p.m. to a report of a man with a gun threatening people in the 15000 block of Seventh Street.

A Facebook Live video posted on a community news group shows multiple deputies and patrol vehicles surrounding a black Chevrolet Suburban parked in a business’ lot.

Several bystanders are heard watching the scene unfold in the video.

After more than an hour, the SUV then begins to travel between two Sheriff’s vehicles and onto the sidewalk, the video shows. A barrage of gunshots are then heard, and the person taking the video appears to run away.

Miller said the man refused to exit his vehicle and was fired upon after he “suddenly accelerated toward deputies and their units.” A deputy was injured and flown to a hospital with what are believed to be non life-threatening injuries.

It was unclear if the driver of the SUV was injured by the shots. He remained in his damaged vehicle, which ended up stopped on the west side of Seventh Street.

Deputies used a loudspeaker to communicate, parked two armored vehicles nearby and two SWAT officers could be seen on a nearby building’s roof with weapons drawn.
A black man with an eye patch could be seen sitting in the vehicle with the driver’s side window blown out.

About an hour later, the man was wheeled away in a gurney to a waiting ambulance. It was unclear if he got out of the SUV voluntarily or was forcibly removed by deputies.

Miller said SWAT took the injured man into custody and to a hospital. She said two guns were found on the man.

He has not been identified and his condition remains unknown. Miller said homicide detectives would continue to investigate.

Darren Cooper, 30, said he was watching the standoff when the shooting began.

“The bullets were coming at us, I swear,” he said. “People and civilians were breaking off. We didn’t know which direction to go in.”

He showed a Daily Press reporter goosebumps on his arm and appeared to be shaken up after the experience.

Wednesday’s incident marks the third deputy-involved shooting in a week in the Victor Valley. On July 10, deputies shot and killed a man in Adelanto they said was advancing toward them, armed with a knife.

On Tuesday, a deputy fired on a truck in Hesperia after officials said the driver drove toward the deputy. The driver, identified as 40-year-old Leaire Moore, had not been found as of Wednesday.

*Martin Estacio may be reached at MEstacio@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-955-5358.*

*Follow him on Twitter @DP_mestacio.*
Deputies shot a man armed with a gun inside his vehicle in a confrontation in Victorville on Wednesday, the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department said.

Around 2:40 p.m., deputies responded to a report of a man with a gun inside a vehicle threatening people nearby in the 15000 block of 7th Street.

The man refused to get out of the vehicle and suddenly drove toward the deputies, who then opened fire, deputies said.

A deputy was injured and was flown to a hospital with non-life threatening injuries.

The man was taken to a hospital, but his condition is unknown at this time. Deputies said they found two guns on the man.
Bystander video of the incident shows a dark-colored SUV driving through a parking lot while numerous shots ring out.

The investigation is ongoing.

Active Standoff on 7th Street in Victorville after reports of a man with a gun
Deputies open fire on suspect driving toward them in Victorville; deputy, suspect injured

A San Bernardino County Sheriff’s SWAT team surrounds a vehicle involved in a shooting with deputies on Seventh Street in Victorville on Wednesday July 17, 2019. (Photo courtesy James Quigg, Daily Press)

By CONTRIBUTED CONTENT |
PUBLISHED: July 17, 2019 at 6:14 pm | UPDATED: July 17, 2019 at 10:50 pm
By Martin Estacio

Daily Press

Contributed content

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Several bystanders are heard watching the scene unfold.

After more than an hour, the SUV then begins to travel between two Sheriff’s vehicles and onto the sidewalk, the video shows. A barrage of multiple shots are then heard, and the person taking the video appears to begin to run away.

Miller said the man refused to exit his vehicle and was fired upon after he “suddenly accelerated toward deputies and their units.” A deputy was injured, flown to a hospital, treated and released. Information on how the deputy was injured was not immediately available.

San Bernardino County Sheriff
@sbcountysheriff

#Victorville Update- The deputy has been treated and released from the hospital and is expected to make a full recovery.
Investigation is ongoing. PR to follow.
108 10:44 PM - Jul 17, 2019

18 people are talking about this

It was unclear if the driver of the SUV was injured by the shots. He remained in his damaged vehicle, which ended up stopped on the west side of Seventh Street.

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A man with an eye patch could be seen sitting in the vehicle with the driver’s side window blown out.

About an hour later, the man was wheeled away in a gurney to a waiting ambulance. It was unclear if the man got out of the SUV voluntarily or was forcibly removed by deputies.

Witnesses say shooting scene. Deputies still asking for someone to come out @VVDailyPress

VIDEO: Deputy wounded in Victorville standoff, apparent shootout abc7.com/video-deputy-h… via @abc7
VIDEO: Deputy wounded in Victorville standoff, apparent shoot...
A deputy has been wounded in a Victorville standoff and apparent shootout where a reportedly armed suspect allegedly tried to ram abc7.com

1 5:49 PM - Jul 17, 2019

See Random Rastafarian's other Tweets

San Bernardino County Sheriff
@sbcountysheriff

#Victorville At 2:39 pm, Deputies responded to the report of a man with a gun inside his car threatening nearby citizens in the 15000 block of 7th Street. The suspect refused to exit his vehicle and suddenly accelerated toward deputies and their units.

48 5:41 PM - Jul 17, 2019

23 people are talking about this

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He has not been identified and information on his condition was not immediately available. Miller said homicide detectives would continue to investigate.

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Tags: officer-involved shooting, Top Stories Sun

Contributed Content

25 Celebs You Didn’t Realize Are Gay – No. 8 Will Surprise Women 📢

By Ninja Journalist

Just by looking at these celebrities, we'd be none the wiser to know they are gay. Meanwhile, they have all publicly...

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Man armed with knives who ran at deputy is fatally shot in Chino Hills, authorities say

Investigators examine the scene of a deputy involved shooting in Chino Hills Wednesday, July 17, 2019. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

By ROBERT GUNDRAN | rgundran@scng.com |
PUBLISHED: July 16, 2019 at 10:26 pm | UPDATED: July 17, 2019 at 11:49 am
A 52-year-old man who was reportedly yelling and walking into traffic Tuesday night in Chino Hills was shot and killed by a sheriff’s deputy after the suspect ran at the deputy with two knives, authorities said.

Less-than-lethal rounds had failed to stop the man, they said.

Jose Javier Gonzalez, 52, of Chino Hills, was taken to Pomona Valley Medical Center where he was pronounced dead just before 12:30 a.m. Wednesday, according to a statement from the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department.

Deputies were called to the area of Descanso and Pipeline avenues at 7:47 p.m. Tuesday, July 16, on reports that the man was brandishing a knife as he yelled and walked in and out of traffic.

Pipeline Avenue was closed for the investigation from Tuesday evening until almost 11 a.m. Wednesday.

Gonzalez “appeared to be under the influence of an unknown substance," the statement said, and would not cooperate with deputies, including orders from them to drop the knives.

Gonzalez threatened to kill people, the sheriff’s statement said.

Anyone with information about the case was asked to contact Detective Chuck Phillips at 909-387-3589. Anonymous reports can be made through WeTip at 800-782-7463 or wetip.com.

Staff writer Richard K. De Atley contributed to this report.

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**Tags:** officer-involved shooting, shooting, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories Sun
SHOTS FIRED LEADS TO AN ARREST IN LANDERS

A report of shots fired led to the arrest of a Landers man Monday. According to a Sheriff's report, a neighbor called about 7:40 a.m. to report she heard shots being fired in the 55400 block of Del Sol Lane in Landers. Deputies contacted Jesse Miller, 28, who was uncooperative.

Deputies learned during a record check that Miller had $155,000 in felony and misdemeanor arrest warrants for spousal abuse, battery, and contempt of court, and had a restraining order filed against him which prohibited him from possessing firearms. Deputies found a pump-action shotgun and four semi-automatic rifles. Miller fought with deputies when they tried to arrest him, but he was eventually subdued. Jesse Miller was arrested for investigation of resisting arrest, booked into the Morongo Basin Jail, with his bail set at $50,000.
Home prices continue to climb with San Bernardino County seeing largest annual increase

Home sales in Southern California were down 9.1 percent year over year.

Median sale prices in June were $842,000 in Orange County, an increase of 0.8% year-over-year; $599,680 in Los Angeles County for a 2.3% boost; $420,000 in Riverside County, up 3.7% and $655,000 in San Diego County, 2.3% higher than 12 months earlier. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

By JACK KATZANEK | jkatzanek@scng.com |
PUBLISHED: July 17, 2019 at 5:10 pm | UPDATED: July 17, 2019 at 5:13 pm

The annual price growth among single-family homes sold across Southern California continued to grow in June, with San Bernardino County leading the gains.

The county with the region’s most affordable homes saw a robust price increase last month, according to the California Association of Realtors, rising to $310,000, a 5.7% increase from June 2018.

That year-over-year increase eclipsed Southern California’s five other counties.
Median sale prices in June were $842,000 in Orange County, an increase of 0.8% year-over-year; $599,680 in Los Angeles County for a 2.3% boost; $420,000 in Riverside County, up 3.7% and $655,000 in San Diego County, 2.3% higher than 12 months earlier.

Month over month, median single-family home prices have increased by 11.2% in Los Angeles County and 2.3% in San Diego County, declined 1.6% in San Bernardino County and by 0.4% in Orange County.

Lower interest rates have gotten a lot of buyers off the fence, said one Inland sales associate.

"A lot of people early in the year were just testing the market but they were titter-tottering and didn't know what they'd do," said Jonathan Perea, an agent with Rancho Cucamonga-based Century 21 King. "Now we have a lot of buyers willing to pull the trigger."

Sellers, in turn, are holding back on saying yes while seeking better bids, Perea said. He said many of the sellers want to buy bigger homes in the area and that sales in High Desert communities are especially strong.

Home sales in Southern California were down 9.1 percent year over year, with every county outside of Ventura (0.6 percent) posting declines. Los Angeles sales fell 12.6 percent followed by San Diego (-12.5 percent), Orange (-7.6 percent), San Bernardino (-7.2 percent) and Riverside (-4 percent).

The sales numbers from May to June showed an increase of 5.7% in San Bernardino County while the rest of the region declined. Los Angeles County saw a 10.8% decline, with San Diego County’s sales falling 10.2% in that period. Riverside and Orange counties’ declines were 8.3% and 4.7%, respectively.

CAR compiles its data from the organization’s 90 regional affiliates.
Michael Milhis is named interim city manager in Fontana

By RUSSELL INGOLD  Jul 15, 2019 Updated Jul 16, 2019

Michael Milhis has been named the interim city manager in Fontana. (Contributed photo by)
Michael Milhisr has been named the interim city manager in Fontana, following the sudden retirement of long-time City Manager Ken Hunt.

Milhisr is a former city manager of Ontario, Montclair and Upland and retired chief administrative officer for the Morongo Band of Mission Indians. He has been a board member of the Monte Vista Water District since 2007.

The City Council voted 4-1 during a closed session meeting on July 15 to bring in Milhisr. Councilmember Jesse Sandoval cast the no vote.

“We thank Ken for his dedicated service to our city and wish him all the best in his retirement,” said Mayor Acquanetta Warren. “We’re fortunate to have someone of Mike Milhisr’s experience and leadership heading our transition team, while we search for a permanent replacement.”

Milhisr said he was very pleased with the opportunity to serve in Fontana.

"It's great," he said. "Fontana is the best city in the state of California to work for, because of all of its leadership and growth."

In addition to Hunt's departure, his assistant, Amy Colbrunn, also left the city.

"Amy Colbrunn, assistant to the city manager, chose to move on from the City of Fontana. We thank her for her service and wish her well," Warren said in a statement.
LOCAL NEWS

Hundreds of new cell antennas could come to Redlands, despite residents’ concerns

Crown Castle provided this photo simulation of a small cell wireless facility on top of a street light near the corner of East Palm Avenue and Roosevelt Road in Redlands at a planning commission meeting in April 2019. The commission approved the permit and a variance for it to be built within 100 feet of homes. (Courtesy of City of Redlands)

By JENNIFER IYER | jiyer@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts
PUBLISHED: July 17, 2019 at 4:33 pm | UPDATED: July 17, 2019 at 4:35 pm
Concerns over the effects of small cell antennas on health, property values and aesthetics brought dozens of residents to Tuesday night's Redlands City Council meeting for the discussion on standards and processes for placement of the facilities.

There could be hundreds of applications coming in the next few years, staff said in agenda documents, as carriers aim to fill coverage gaps and prepare for the rollout of new technology, dubbed 5G.

The city has little choice, according to staff, as federal government regulations change.

But that didn't stop residents, some of whom had been attending council and planning commission meetings for months.

Nancy Baker, a medical doctor, worries about cancer and other health effects or electromagnetic radiation from the antennas. She said residents have proposed several options to the city regarding location preferences.

“We are not against deployment of 5G, we're saying put them in safe places,” she said. “Don't put them in front of our children.”

Other cities have adopted regulations prohibiting antenna placement within 300 feet of residences, or relegating them to industrial or commercial areas, she told the City Council on Tuesday.

She asked that councilmembers continue the item to a future meeting, so staff could look into such ideas.
“This is your opportunity to work for the citizens who are here today,” Baker said.

The push is no longer to install large towers, which often resemble trees, according to Development Services Director Brian Desatnik, but now the concept is to use small antennas, which often go on top of utility poles, street lights or new stand-alone poles.

Locations are governed by line-of-sight requirements, and availability of public space, thus placement of the antennas near residences is sometimes necessary, according to city staff.

Another problem, said Gail Karish, special counsel for the city, is that “local authority has been chipped away by state and federal laws.”

The Federal Communicationc Commission requires actions be made in a “reasonable” amount of time, she told the council, and “you can't create rules or make decisions that would effectively prohibit the provision of personal wireless services.”

Federal law also does not allow local governments to consider “any effects of radio frequency emissions if the applicant can demonstrate that they meet the FCC standards,” Karish said.

Rules created by other cities that don't meet these, might not stand the test of litigation, she said.

Tim Brown with Crown Castle, which installs the facilities, said more than half of homes in the country are solely reliant on wireless services, and about 85% of 911 calls are made on cell phones.

“We absolutely stick to the FCC guidelines in all that we do,” he said. “We insure that when people do pick up the phone, either out of luxury or out of necessity, that they have coverage.”

The proposal in front of the Council includes:

- An ordinance to let wireless companies obtain a permit through an administrative process, instead of sending every permit to the planning commission or the City Council. It also requires nearby property owners to be told, and gives affected parties the chance to appeal, Desatnik said.
- Design and development standards requiring the facilities to be small, low profile and concealed.
The City Council voted 3-1 in favor of introducing the ordinance and approving the standards. Councilman Eddie Tejeda dissented saying he wanted to represent the will of the community. Councilman Paul Barich recused himself due to possible conflicts of interest.

The ordinance will come back for a final vote at a future meeting.

A licensing agreement to install facilities on city-owned structures will also come before the council at a later date, as will a contract for a consultant who would review projects to be paid for out of application fees.
Riverside County still uses a 2006 Emergency Operations Plan

Sam Metz, Palm Springs Desert Sun  Published 4:30 a.m. PT July 15, 2019 | Updated 11:47 a.m. PT July 16, 2019

The Cranston Fire in the Idyllwild area of the San Jacinto Mountains began on Wednesday, July 25, 2018. Palm Springs Desert Sun

On the day the Cranston Fire ignited and began to blaze through more than 13,000 acres in the San Bernardino National Forest, Idyllwild resident Susan Nash and her husband hooked up their trailer and started to head down the mountain as smoke rose in the skies behind her.

Nash now says she's lucky the fire didn't damage her home, but after record-setting wildfires swept through California in 2018, she decided she wanted to ensure Idyllwild was prepared for the next burn. So she and other mountain residents went to meet with Riverside County Supervisor Chuck Washington to discuss the county's evacuation plans.
"We told him we were concerned—after the Cranston Fire and the Camp Fire in Paradise, where people didn't get out—that the county update the evacuation plan," Nash said.

Almost a year later, as peak wildfire season nears, Riverside County's Emergency Management Department has yet to submit promised updates to the county’s 13-year-old Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) or release specific evacuation planning documents Nash requested.

At a Board of Supervisors Meeting earlier this month, Nash chided county officials for what she called a lack of preparedness. She said she had submitted multiple public records requests for the county’s evacuation plans for Idyllwild and the surrounding communities and had not received anything in response.

Nash told the board she had difficulty getting in touch with Cal Fire and County EMD officials, who were no longer returning her calls. Idyllwild Fire Chief Mark LaMont told her he couldn't release an evacuation plan because if arsonists got ahold of it, it could help them inflict maximum damage.

After her remarks, Riverside County Emergency Management Department spokesman Shane Reichardt and Cal Fire Chief Ed Moore both approached Nash to reassure her that, even though the county was still negotiating updates to its new EOP, it had plans in place for an emergency.

Nash told both men she was unconvinced. With portions of Highways 74 and 243 still closed from storm damage caused by February's record rainfall, Nash said the county needed to publish an evacuation plan.

“They've been stonewalling me, saying, ‘Oh Sue, wouldn’t you feel bad if an arsonist got the plan?’ ” she said. “We asked for these plans in May, here it’s July. Halfway through fire season, coming up on the anniversary of the Cranston Fire, we need it online.”

Plans outdated, plans withheld

California does not require communities to maintain documents outlining specific evacuation plans, and an April USA TODAY Network-California investigation found that only 22% of the state’s communities deemed most at risk of wildfire had publicly available plans.

Many fire chiefs and emergency management leaders said wildfires were too unpredictable for written plans to be relevant, but others, including the mayor of Paradise, said maintaining up-to-date written plans was essential to disaster preparedness.

“To me, it says: One, communities are complacent or ignorant of the risks, and two, it’s a failure on the part of local and state governments to not require them,” — certainly for the highest hazard communities, Tom Cova, a geography professor who specializes in emergency management, said in response to the USA TODAY Network reporters’ findings.

The Riverside County EOP defines the responsibilities and coordination protocols for various departments during emergency situations such as foods and wildfires. For the new plan, agencies including the Sheriff’s Department, Animal Services and Riverside County Fire have all provided input about their ability to respond to emergency situations. The County Emergency Management will incorporate the feedback, make
revisions and submit the new plan to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

County Emergency Management Director Bruce Barton said the 2006 plan included outdated information on departmental responsibilities. He intended to revise it after assuming his role in 2017, but after severe wildfires and storms, had yet to submit the input compiled from the county's relevant agencies.

The county's current Emergency Management Department was established in 2015, replacing the former Office of Emergency Services, but the current EOP still contains references to the old department, even though it no longer exists. The plan also references an outdated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan that has been updated multiple times since 2006, Barton said.

"It hasn't been updated and still had old nomenclature," Barton said. "Some of the edits (in the new draft) are purely based upon whether a department does things anymore."

Even though the county hasn't updated its EOP, Barton remains confident county departments are prepared to coordinate with one another during an emergency. He pointed to their track record of successful responses, citing last year's Cranston Fire in particular. Preparedness, Barton said, can't be reflected in any planning document because emergency situations are all different.

"We're prepared. There's a plan in place," he said. "Is that in writing anywhere? No. Does the fact that it's not make us less prepared? No."

Departments deny public records requests

Typically, Emergency Operations Plans are high-level documents that contain general information rather than specific details about evacuation scenarios. A Mountain Area Safety Task Force document outlining specific emergency incident scenarios for the mountain communities of Idyllwild, Pine Cove and Mountain Center does exist.

The Emergency Management Department provided The Desert Sun with the 2006 Emergency Operations Plan, a new draft document and a template emergency responders use during incidents, but denied The Desert Sun's California Public

Records Act request for the Mountain Area Safety Task Force document because, Barton said, it may confuse residents.

“That tactical-level detail, in our opinion, the public good for releasing is outweighed by the potential bad, because it doesn’t tell residents anything they need to evacuate the mountain,” he said.

Reichardt, the Emergency Management Department spokesman, said publicizing concrete evacuation plans worries emergency management personnel because they fear residents may second-guess what public safety officials tell them during an emergency.

“Our advice to the public is to listen and obey the directions given by public safety officials, don’t second-guess what public safety is telling them,” he said. “That’s what’s happening. People are gathering as much information as they can and then putting themselves in danger.”

In addition to updating the names of agencies and their responsibilities, the new draft’s evacuation protocols are outlined in an Emergency Support Function (ESF), which Barton said he plans to submit to the Board of Supervisors in August. It contains the following new information:

- The new draft updates the jurisdictions that participate in local hazard mitigation planning. In 2005, before the last EOP was approved, 53 jurisdictions—including cities, Native American tribes, hospitals and school districts—coordinated work in Riverside County to reduce emergency risk. In 2017, only 45 decided to participate. The 2019 draft EOP updates the emergency operations protocols to account for the jurisdictions that participate in hazard mitigation.
- The 2019 draft specifies law enforcement, namely the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department, as the lead agency coordinating evacuation and re-entry. The 2006 EOP’s description of law enforcement’s role does not include anything about evacuation or re-entry.
- In the 2006 EOP, the “Care and Shelter Branch” and the Department of Public and Social Services was responsible for ensuring animal welfare during emergency situations. The 2019 draft plan includes specific information about animal evacuation, to comply with updates to the Stafford Act passed after the approval of the 2006 EOP. The 2019 draft conforms to the new law and “requires evacuation plans to consider the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals, prior to, during, and following a major disaster or emergency.”
The Desert Sun requested emergency and evacuation plans from the Idyllwild Fire Department and was denied.

Chief LaMont said the details in the document could contribute to confusion during evacuations because, "someone simply utilizing a static pre-plan without the experience, knowledge and real-time information required to make these decisions during these types of dynamic events would run the risk of making the wrong determinations."

But Nash, the Idyllwild attorney, said during the Cranston Fire, EMS text notifications failed to reach all Idyllwild residents when cell towers went down. After that experience, she said the county needed to release all its evacuation planning documents.

"In the midst of fire season, it’s not the time to find out what the primary and secondary evacuation routes are," she said.
Riverside County Emergency Operations Plan hasn't been updated since 2006

From left, Auggie Berg, a hiker passing through Idyllwild and Reba Coulter, a resident of Idyllwild have spent three nights at the American Red Cross shelter in Banning High School due to the Cranston fire. (Photo: Omar Ornelas, The Desert Sun-USA TODAY NETWORK)

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Wildfire and environment reporter Gabrielle Paluch contributed reporting.
News > Crime + Public Safety

Women in Riverside County jail stage 16-day hunger strike over their treatment

By Nikie Johnson | njohnson@scng.com | Published: July 17, 2019 at 6:59 pm | Updated: July 17, 2019 at 7:00 pm

Claiming they're mistreated and their complaints have been ignored, a small group of women in Riverside County’s largest jail spent 16 days on a hunger strike.

They called it off Monday night when jail staff agreed to try to work with the inmates on some of the issues they were protesting, said Chantel Cox, who initiated the strike among four women in a high-security area of the Robert Presley Detention Center in Riverside.

Among the issues raised by Cox and fellow inmate Yolanda Velasco: They claim they've been sexually harassed by deputies, don't believe their reports have been investigated and think they've been retaliated against for complaining about that and other problems.

They say most of the women in their housing area are still only getting 30 minutes a day outside their cells, but thought the men in a similar high-security area have been getting 90 minutes a day following their own hunger strike in January.

“They're violating our First Amendment right to equal protection,” Velasco said in a phone interview. “They made changes for the men, but have made none for us.”
They also say they don’t have enough privacy when they need to talk to medical or mental health staff — an issue the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department has been trying to fix under federal court order. And they were distressed about the level of care given to mentally ill women housed in the same area, describing one inmate who they say has been ignored while self-mutilating — a sergeant merely gave her cleaning supplies to wipe up the blood, they claimed — and ended up trying to hang herself Monday night.

Deputy Mike Vasquez, a sheriff’s spokesman, said he couldn’t address any health care issues related to a specific inmate because of privacy laws, and couldn’t confirm whether there was a suicide attempt at the jail Monday.

He said that if someone reported sexual harassment or abuse, the department would begin to investigate immediately.

He also denied there’s any difference in how much time male and female inmates get out of their cells for what the department calls dayroom time.

The high-security area where both hunger strikes this year took place is called administrative segregation, or “ad_seg.” Inmates are sent there if they’ve been deemed a threat to others. Dayroom time is the only chance those inmates have to do things like take a shower, make phone calls or see anything outside of their cells.

The law requires inmates get at least 30 minutes a day out of their cells, Vasquez said. One reason for the men’s hunger strike was they said even that small amount of time was often cut short. A June report from Riverside County’s civil grand jury, which serves as a watchdog over public agencies, criticized that practice and urged the Sheriff’s Department to set fairer policies.

Vasquez said the department had already begun in mid-2018 to evaluate its policies on ad-seg dayroom time. A new policy that took effect March 1 says all inmates should get out for at least an hour a day. A schedule is set to make sure inmates who might not get along with each other aren’t out at the same time.

Asked why the women might be claiming they were still only getting 30 minutes, he said, “Individuals having difficulties being around others, that may affect when they’re let out, but as a practice, since March 1, 2019, both men and women are allowed no less than 60 minutes a day.”

That’s still not enough, said Sara Norman, an attorney with the Prison Law Office, which won a federal class-action lawsuit in 2015 over the quality of health care in Riverside County’s jails, and is monitoring the jails until they meet all the terms of the settlement.
“Thirty or even 90 minutes a day is not acceptable from our perspective. We don't think it complies with basic human needs,” she said, adding: “We welcome any moves by the Sheriff’s Department to expand out-of-cell time.”

As for the female inmates’ complaints that medical and mental health staff have to stand outside their cells where everyone else can hear them talk, Norman agreed that’s an area where the jails are still out of compliance with the court order. The physical space of the jails just isn't conducive to privacy, she said, and the staff also still needs more training.

“We have continued to express concerns to the county over the confidentiality of health care,” she said. “The county has been responsive, we've had productive conversations, but there are still significant concerns.”

Velasco, 30, and Cox, 34 — who are both facing charges of theft and identity theft in unrelated cases and who both have past convictions for violent, nonviolent and drug crimes — said they and two other women in ad-seg began refusing meals June 30.

Cox said that a few days later, she was transferred to the county jail near Banning, which she believed was to try to break up the hunger strike. She eventually was sent back to Riverside.

Cox said all four inmates lost between seven and 20 pounds, and one of the women fell and cracked her head a few days into the hunger strike; Velasco said she thought it was a stress-induced seizure.

Vasquez said all inmates were checked regularly by medical staff, and no inmates suffered health issues that were deemed to be directly related to their refusal to accept food.

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Tags: Jails, Top Stories PE

Nikie Johnson
Nikie Johnson is a data reporter for Southern California News Group, using numbers and public records to uncover
A case against the city of Encinitas offers a window into the subjective and arbitrary way that individual officials decide what is and isn’t a public record.

By Jesse Marx.

Encinitas has one of the shortest records retention policies in San Diego County. It deletes emails deemed unimportant to the public at 30 days. But that could soon change.
Next month, the City Council will consider a new policy requiring staff to hang onto emails for the same length of time that it hangs onto other types of records: two years. Mayor Catherine Blakespear, who has already signaled her support for that effort, said it’s important “we do show people what we’re doing.”

Many municipalities argue that emails are a special kind of communication, but the courts, the Legislature and public are increasingly pushing back on the notion that emails aren’t subject to the same California Public Records act rules as other government documents.

A deposition filed recently in an Encinitas public records-related case gives a good sense why. It is a window into the subjective and arbitrary way that individual officials decide what is and isn’t a public record on a timetable convenient for no one but themselves.

In April, Donald McPherson, an Encinitas property owner, sued the city for failing to release all written communications between officials and the development team that has been renovating the Portofino Beach Inn along Coast Highway 101. His attorney, Felix Tinkov, quickly turned his attention on the city’s practice of deleting emails at 30 days, and recently got a chance to interrogate an official about the process. (Disclosure: Tinkov also represents Voice of San Diego in public records disputes.)

Todd Mierau, an associate planner for Encinitas, said he prints out copies of emails and attachments that he believes are worth preserving long-term and places them in a physical file. Everything else gets deleted — typically within three weeks — before it “clogs” up his computer system.

“So we’re constantly deleting out e-mails that aren’t, in our opinion, important to the project,” he said. Later in the deposition, he explained that he often deals with “hard-copy studies” and does a lot of city business either by phone or in person.

”E-mails are kind of irrelevant,” he said.

Mierau also broke down his thinking on what makes for a public record and what doesn’t. An example of an email message not likely worth keeping: “We want you to see the window design.” An example of an email likely worth keeping: “Please provide ten sets of plans with the information as specified in the letter we’ve already previously given you.”

At one point, Tinkov asks Mierau to clarify whether he cleans out his inbox roughly every two weeks.

”Purge it — yeah — physically,” he responded. “There’s a lot of stuff received that way. It’s not
important to the record, essentially.”

The implication in Mierau’s deposition is that emails for a city like Encinitas are largely an afterthought and only become part of the public record when they need to be. By deciding what’s worth keeping and what’s worth dropping, officials have given themselves near total control over what the rest of us can see.

Mierau’s thinking on retention is not unique. Most municipalities in San Diego County delete emails from their servers within the two-year state-mandated minimum for similar reasons. They argue they’re saving taxpayer money on storage and software, and the time of information technology employees who must navigate through the large swaths of data.

“Our server does not allow us to handle a certain number of emails,” said Paul Brencick, a management analyst in the Encinitas city manager’s office.

According to city policy, each member of staff is limited to 200 megabytes, except in special circumstances. Over the next fiscal year, the city is projected to spend $37,080 on server costs.

Kelly Aviles, an attorney who specializes in public records cases, told me that she finds public agencies’ financial justifications for deleting email records to be “insane.” Email storage costs are getting cheaper and cheaper, she said, while printing and physical storage is likely to cost more. But more importantly, she said, no one else is allowed to argue that they can’t comply with the law because they can’t afford to.

“I need tags on my vehicle,” she said. “I don’t get to say when I’m pulled over by police, ‘You know, it just costs too much these days; I can’t do it.’”

Because the California Public Records Act doesn’t specify emails, many public agencies across the state maintain that emails can be classified in different ways, depending on how useful that email could be to the public in the future. In other words, if an email preserves information that couldn’t be obtained elsewhere, it should be saved. Everything else is considered a draft and eventually public agencies discard it.

Indeed, the definition of a public record is intentionally vague under California law. But Aviles said that’s meant to ensure public agencies capture more, not less.

“Having those arbitrary destruction policies creates an environment where people can delete things they just prefer the public not have,” she said. “And that’s not the law. It flies in the face of the
Around the same time McPherson fled his suit in Encinitas, the ACLU sued Orange County on behalf of a homelessness task force, alleging that officials were violating several state laws, including the California Public Records Act. The Orange County Superior Court last week banned the county from enforcing its own records destruction policy. Judge Sheila Fell rejected the county’s claim that officials could delete records they deemed to be “transitory” — essentially a draft, not important to the public business — before the law’s two-year retention period had ended.

Encinitas expects its staff to review their emails at least once a week and print or file away permanent records in either a separate email folder or network location or physical folder. Anything “intended for a temporary purpose” should be “discarded after the purpose is achieved,” the policy states. “Care should be taken that no e-mails are retained unless they are meant to be official records.”

Each employee gets a finite amount of space for their inbox, and the city encourages staffers to “delete documents which are not otherwise required to be kept by law or whose preservation is not necessary or convenient to the discharge of duties or the conduct of the City’s business.”

In case they don’t, all incoming, sent and deleted emails that are older than 30 days are automatically deleted from the system daily. E-mails are not backed up on a permanent basis and according to city policy, only current emails can be restored if the system fails.

Tinkov said he’s asked the city to try to recover older records related to the Portofino project, but an IT staffer “didn’t have high hopes — she said the emails are ‘hard-deleted’ by the system.”

The Encinitas City Council is expected to revisit its email retention policy on Aug. 21. Brencick said the city had nothing to release to the public yet, but the conversation will likely touch on storage costs.

In the meantime, a bill written by San Diego Assemblyman Todd Gloria, whose district extends from Imperial Beach to Solana Beach mostly along the coast, would require government agencies to keep email records for two years. AB 1184 passed the Assembly in May and the Senate Judiciary Committee last week.

*Originally posted at Voice of San Diego.*
Robots are scaling warehouse shelves to get stuff to you faster

Amazon's orange Kiva robots lift stacks of merchandise and move them to employee stations. A new generation of warehouse robots from Locus Robotics will be able to travel long distances and scale high shelves that are out of reach of humans. (Andrea Chang / Los Angeles Times)

By BLOOMBERG

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A logistics company partly owned by Related Cos. is searching for locations across North America to build its multistory robotic warehouses.

Robots — and humans — started working this month at Quiet Logistics' new 440,000-square-foot fulfillment center in the Los Angeles area. It’s the firm’s first property on the West Coast, and a model for as many as seven more the company aims to build near population centers by 2022, with the goal of getting goods to consumers faster.

“Some people assume these large facilities should be in rural areas with more open space, but they work better in cities that are close to more people and more labor,” Chief Executive Bruce Welty said in an interview.

Quiet Logistics — which fulfills orders for fashion and lifestyle brands such as Bonobos, M. Gemi and Outdoor Voices — is scouting locations in the U.S. Southwest, Midwest and Southeast and also exploring the possibility of building in Canada and Mexico. Multilevel construction uses less real estate than traditional sprawling, single-story warehouses, an advantage in urban areas where land is scarce and costly.

At the California center, in La Palma, robots designed by Quiet Logistics spinoff Locus Robotics will be able to travel long distances across the building and scale high shelves that are out of reach of humans. With the rise of same-day and next-day delivery options made popular by Amazon.com, the automation is necessary to meet the expectations of the company’s fashion clients, who have large customer bases in the L.A. area, Welty said.

That doesn’t mean robots are taking over. In fact, the demand for fast fulfillment will require more human labor than ever before, according to Welty. Quiet Logistics aims to hire about 500 full-time employees who will work in tandem with the robots at the two-story La Palma center, the company’s fifth U.S. warehouse.

Related — known for its $25-billion Hudson Yards project on Manhattan’s West Side, with office and residential skyscrapers and a $2-billion mall — in March teamed up with Greenfield Partners to buy Quiet Logistics, extending the developer’s reach into e-commerce. The soaring popularity of
online shopping has helped make warehouses the best-performing segment of the property market this year, according to a Bloomberg index of real estate investment trusts.

But landlords should take caution before expanding aggressively into vertical fulfillment centers, according to David Egan, global head of industrial and logistics research at CBRE Group Inc. Because there are few such properties in existence, most of the savings and benefits are theoretical, he said.

“We don’t know what the economics look like,” Egan said. “We don’t know what the rents are going to be, and we don’t know what’s going to happen when the users’ lease runs out and the spaces have to be taken over by a second generation of renters.”

Bloomberg

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