

KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Evacuation Authority and Field Operations

Purpose

This training bulletin provides standardized guidance for deputies, supervisors, and command staff regarding the Kern County Sheriff's Office responsibilities and best practices when conducting evacuations during emergencies. It outlines the Sheriff's legal authority, integrates applicable state and local protocols—including those from Cal OES—and details coordination procedures with Fire and Emergency Services through the Incident Command System (ICS).

Legal Authority

Under California Penal Code § 409.5, peace officers, including sheriffs and their deputies, are legally authorized to close areas and issue evacuation orders when a threat to public safety exists due to disaster or calamity. This legal authority ensures centralized control of public movement during emergencies and supersedes the authority of other agencies when public safety is at risk.

Other agencies have closure authority within their respective domains:

- County Public Works Departments may close roads due to flooding, structural damage, or debris hazards under county ordinance.
- Caltrans has authority over closures and restrictions on state highways per California Streets and Highways Code §§ 91 and 92.
- County Public Health Officers may order facility or area closures in response to health threats under Health and Safety Code § 120175.

While these authorities are valid within their respective scopes, only peace officers are authorized to issue evacuation orders and enforce closures under Penal Code § 409.5. Collaboration with all stakeholders—such as Public Works, Animal Control, Public Health, and Caltrans—is essential to ensure effective interagency coordination, communication, and safe operations.

Law Enforcement Responsibilities

Deputies and supervisors are responsible for:

- Issuing and enforcing evacuation orders.
- Maintaining law and order within evacuated zones.
- Establishing and staffing road closures and control points.
- Coordinating with allied agencies on sheltering, repopulation, and logistical support.

Evacuation Planning and Coordination with Fire (ICS)

Evacuation planning must be guided by sound operational judgment and executed through Unified Command, particularly with Fire agencies, Emergency Services, and other stakeholders. While law enforcement holds statutory authority to issue and enforce evacuation orders under Penal Code § 409.5, collaboration with Fire—who possess specialized knowledge of fire behavior, threat progression, hazard zones, and suppression tactics—is essential to shaping safe and effective evacuation strategies.

When evaluating evacuation needs, deputies and supervisors should consider:

- Direction, speed, and intensity of the threat (e.g., wildfire, flood).
- Population density and resident mobility.
- Availability and condition of evacuation routes.
- Time of day and weather conditions.
- Presence of critical infrastructure or vulnerable facilities.

Deputies and supervisors shall:

1. Respond promptly to the Incident Command Post (ICP).
2. Assume Incident Command of Sheriff's Operations until relieved by a supervisor or command staff.
3. Initiate evacuations when conditions warrant.
4. Collaborate with Fire on zone identification and deployment.
5. Respect Fire's role while asserting law enforcement authority.
6. Engage in unified public messaging.
7. Maintain professionalism under Unified Command.
8. Coordinate with agencies during repopulation.

Exigent Circumstances and Remote Evacuation Coordination

In exigent situations—such as a rapidly advancing fire threatening a residential neighborhood—evacuations may need to begin without an in-person consultation between the Fire Department and the Sheriff's Office. In such cases, the Fire Incident Commander will notify their dispatch that evacuations must begin. This information will be relayed to the Sheriff's Communications Center, which will notify the designated Sheriff's Incident Commander. The Sheriff's representative shall respond with 'copy and concur,' thereby authorizing the evacuation while preserving the agency's legal authority under Penal Code § 409.5.

Evacuation Messaging and Public Notification

When the Sheriff's Office concurs with an evacuation warning or order, the Fire Department will issue the alert using the Genasys Protect computer-based mapping system. This system defines evacuation zones and sends public notifications stating that the evacuation was issued by the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Public Information Officer (PIO) will coordinate with Fire, Emergency Services, and other county entities to issue a unified public message via media briefings, official websites, and social media. This ensures consistent, accurate public communication during emergencies.

Evacuation Procedure and Refusal Documentation

Deputies shall:

1. Receive assignments and confirm objectives with supervisors.
2. Identify safe access and exit routes.
3. Contact residents by knocking and announcing presence.
4. Advise residents of evacuation level (Warning or Order).
5. Provide evacuation routes and shelter information (If known).
6. Log the resident's response (compliance or refusal) in CAD or other tracking system.
7. If a resident refuses:
 - Advise them of risks and that emergency services may not return.
 - Document refusal in CAD, noting address, and drivable vehicles in the driveway.
 - If safe and time permits, gather names, DOBs, contact info, and vehicle info.
8. Document all contacts and observations.
9. Use chalk, tape, or placards per ICP direction if instructed.
10. Maintain composure and visibility to reassure the public.
11. Activate Body-Worn Camera (BWC) for all evacuation contacts.

Refusal documentation should never delay evacuations under dangerous or deteriorating conditions.

Evacuating Special Populations

Special consideration must be given to individuals who require additional time or resources during evacuations. This includes elderly residents, those with mobility impairments, cognitive or developmental disabilities, or limited access to transportation.

Deputies shall:

- Coordinate with Public Health and Social Services.
- Contact Animal Control for evacuating pets or livestock.
- Use language access services for non-English speakers.
- Document unmet needs and referrals in CAD or evacuation software.

Begin evacuation of special populations during the warning phase whenever possible to allow time for planning and reduce risk of late-stage rescues.

Deputy Safety and Field Readiness During Evacuations

Deputy safety is paramount during evacuation operations. Personnel must:

- Assign a safety monitor to track hazard behavior.
- Maintain situational awareness and avoid tunnel vision.
- Use proper PPE in hazardous environments.
- Avoid unstable structures.
- Operate in pairs and maintain radio contact.
- Monitor for aggressive or distressed individuals.
- Park vehicles facing a safe exit route.
- Stay hydrated and rotate duties as needed to prevent exhaustion.

Post-Evacuation Patrol and Access Control

Following evacuations, deputies may be assigned to:

- Patrol and secure the evacuated zones.
- Monitor for unauthorized re-entry.
- Limit access to credentialed emergency personnel.
- Coordinate with allied agencies on reentry logs and protocols.

Media Access (PC § 409.5(d)): Authorized media representatives (news, TV, radio, newspapers) cannot be denied access to disaster or evacuation zones solely based on area closure.

After-Action and Debriefing

Supervisors shall document field activity and observations post-incident. This includes:

- Zone coverage and refusal trends.
- Communication or logistical challenges.
- Lessons learned and documentation gaps.

All deputies should participate in debriefs to support policy and training improvements.

Conclusion

Effective, lawful, and coordinated evacuation operations are vital to public safety. These are a statutory responsibility of the Sheriff's Office under Penal Code § 409.5. Deputies and supervisors are expected to act decisively, collaborate professionally, and document thoroughly.

All affected personnel must review and acknowledge this training bulletin no later than **July 17, 2025.**