



Santa Cruz County
Civil Grand Jury

Grand Jury <grandjury@scgrandjury.org>

Grand Jury report response from Felton Fire Protection District

1 message

Robert Gray <rgray@feltonfire.com>

Thu, Sep 17, 2020 at 6:32 PM

To: grandjury@scgrandjury.org

Cc: Laurie Dennis <ldennis@feltonfire.com>

Please find attached the Felton Fire District's response to the Grand Jury report "Ready aim fire" and "fire and safety inspection in Santa Cruz County" Please let me know if you have any questions.

Regards,

--

Robert Gray

Fire Chief

Felton Fire Protection District

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Felton, CA 95018

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2 attachments

FireInspection_FeltonFireBoD_Packet July23.docx
132K

FireRisks_FeltonFPD_Packet grand jury 7 23 20.docx
142K



**The 2019–2020 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury
Requires that the
Felton Fire Protection District Board of Directors
Respond to the Findings and Recommendations
Specified in the Report Titled
Ready? Aim? Fire!
Santa Cruz County on the Hot Seat
by October 1, 2020**

When the response is complete, please

1. Email the completed Response Packet as a file attachment to grandjury@scgrandjury.org, and
2. Print and send a hard copy of the completed Response Packet to

The Honorable Judge John Gallagher
Santa Cruz Courthouse
701 Ocean St.
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Instructions for Respondents

California law PC §933.05 (included [below](#)) requires the respondent to a Grand Jury report to comment on each finding and recommendation within a report. Explanations for disagreements and timeframes for further implementation or analysis must be provided. Please follow the format below when preparing the responses.

Response Format

1. For the Findings included in this Response Packet, select one of the following responses and provide the required additional information:
 - a. **AGREE** with the Finding, or
 - b. **PARTIALLY DISAGREE** with the Finding and specify the portion of the Finding that is disputed and include an explanation of the reasons therefor, or
 - c. **DISAGREE** with the Finding and provide an explanation of the reasons therefor.
2. For the Recommendations included in this Response Packet, select one of the following actions and provide the required additional information:
 - a. **HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**, with a summary regarding the implemented action, or
 - b. **HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE**, with a timeframe or expected date for implementation, or
 - c. **REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS**, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for that analysis or study; this timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report, or
 - d. **WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

Validation

Date of the Board's response approval: September 14, 2020

If you have questions about this response form, please contact the Grand Jury by calling 831-454-2099 or by sending an email to grandjury@scgrandjury.org.

Findings

F1. Vegetation/fuel management and abatement are not receiving the attention nor funding needed from the County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors, and therefore are not adhering to California Government Executive Order 1.8.19-EO-N-05-19.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

We can only speak to the 5th district, however Bruce McPherson has been a supporter hosting several community meetings on the topic of wildfire preparation and recently contributed \$20,000 to a fuel reduction project along Mt Hermon Rd to fortify one of the main evacuation routes out of the San Lorenzo Valley.

F2. Santa Cruz County residents are at increased risk of fire danger due to the lack of risk management for wildfire. Specific risks are not formally identified, tracked, assessed for impact, nor is progress reported by fire departments in the County. Therefore, leaders responsible for budgets and accountability are left unprepared to manage risk, impact, or performance.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The development of a local risk assessment tool is in progress with participation from all the county fire agencies, County office of emergency services, and CAL Fire. Establishing best practices for balancing fuel reduction with environmental impact needs to be considered before implementing new policy. Currently, we follow the fire risk map used by CAL Fire in the state responsibility area (SRA) for tracking risk within our district. Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County helps secure grant funding and tracks fuel reduction efforts across the county as well.

F3. City and County officials have not collaborated with PG&E to identify the location of high risk PG&E electrical equipment, and so are left uninformed as to how to manage their responsibilities or how to instruct residents about potential danger due to proximity to this equipment.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The County Office of Emergency Services has hosted several meetings with PG&E where county first responders could ask questions regarding PG&E's policies and procedures for wildfire response, power shut offs, and offered training to the fire crews on identification of electrical hazards in the wildland. PG&E has hosted several town hall meetings in 2019, in the San Lorenzo Valley to educate residents on how to prepare for power shutoffs and other emergencies.

F5. Santa Cruz County would greatly benefit if steps were taken to implement the CAL FIRE, San Mateo - Santa Cruz Unit 2018 recommendation of developing detailed, site specific Community Wildfire Protection Plans for communities throughout the County.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

This is also in progress currently

F6. Response time data for fire departments in Santa Cruz County is challenging to obtain. Santa Cruz Regional 9-1-1 previously reported response time data in their annual reports, but did not do so in the 2018 or 2019 annual reports.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

F10. Roadside vegetation in rural areas of the County is not being cleared consistently which could potentially increase emergency response time, putting life and property in unnecessary danger. Furthermore, evacuations could be restricted as there is no rule or program that mandates that roads, even critical evacuation routes, be kept cleared meeting defensible space requirements.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

F11. There are only approximately 17,000 accounts for the Santa Cruz County opt-in CodeRED™ emergency system, which implies that a significant portion of the County may not receive emergency alert messages, which potentially reduces residents' opportunity to take action in a timely, life-saving manner.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

We would like to explore options for expanding alerting. Code Red has been a great tool but has limitations in areas where cellular service is lost in power shut offs. AM radio and NOAA weather alert radios show potential for expanding the reach of alerting.

F12. Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRADs), have been deployed in other areas of the state and have proven effective tools in alerting residents in urban and rural areas to a wildfire. However, Santa Cruz County has no such devices, increasing the risk to County residents.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

LRADS were used prior to 1980 in the San Lorenzo Valley to alert volunteer firefighters of an emergency, 3 cycles for medical and 5 cycles for fire. The challenge was reaching all of the “outliers” as the topography of the valley makes it challenging to alert all residents with a volume that catch the residents attention with the ambient noise inside the home. Communicating what the resident should do when they hear the siren is also a challenge with the dynamic nature of wildfire. Control of evacuation is a concern as well, when the siren goes off everyone leaves at once causing gridlock. The ability to evacuate certain areas before others can be effective in getting everyone to safety.

F13. High risk communities in the County are left unnecessarily vulnerable due to the lack of easily accessible, published information of refuge/assembly areas and structures.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

When discussing areas of refuge care must be given to not give the illusion of safe assembly points for all circumstances. Depending on several factors such as fire location, direction of fire travel, wind, topography, number of residents needing to evacuate/refuge, and how much time is there to evacuate. We currently educate our community on how to identify 2 ways out and 2 areas of refuge from where they live or work. In the San Lorenzo Valley most of the areas that could serve as areas of refuge are along the Hwy 9 corridor and familiar to the residents. In the event we needed to use an area of refuge, law enforcement would direct traffic off Hwy 9 into the open spaces. Through the use of fire modeling software we hope to validate our fire protection plans and publish information in regards to when and where to go for safety.

F14. Because the County does not publish a “shelter in place” plan, when a fire expands rapidly, residents cannot make informed decisions about whether to shelter in place or evacuate.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

We educate citizens using social media and at public events to be prepared not scared, a program to help residents with what can be done to prepare, and therefore giving them tools to make an educated decision in an emergency situation. We do agree that more could be done to make this more available to the masses

F15. Unlike the City of Santa Cruz, the County does not publish emergency evacuation routes, purportedly to avoid having old or untimely information being followed in an emergency. The County therefore withholds revealing evacuation routes until an emergency is in progress, likely creating unnecessary risk and potential for chaos.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

Work is in progress to validate the plans and routes that have been created. With the use of fire modeling software we hope to test the plans then publish them sometime in 2021. Care must be given to consider all of the geographic challenges within in San Lorenzo Valley to avoid unnecessary revisions. We will not publish information that has not been vetted to be effective as intended.

F16. In the Wildland Urban Interface zone, and in many town centers, traffic choke points exist, and in some instances have roadway obstacles to traffic flow such as overgrown vegetation, concrete medians, curbs, and lane reductions resulting in roads that are inadequate for mass evacuations.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

F19. Wildfire preparedness informational materials are well done and public education is attempted by fire departments in the County, but fails to sufficiently reach and motivate residents to act.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

F20. The FireWise institution provides a valuable fire prevention program and, as of March 2020, there were eight FireWise communities registered in the County. Marin County, by contrast, with a similar population, has sixty registered communities, highlighting the need for more FireWise promotion and participation in Santa Cruz County.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

F21. The County Office of Emergency Services and fire agencies in the County encourage residents to be prepared for an emergency, however the passive mechanisms such as web sites used to encourage preparedness are not proving to be sufficient.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

F22. Property owners in the County are responsible for their own vegetation management, yet they are often not sufficiently educated about vegetation management practices, or do not have the capability, financial resources, or desire to create defensible space.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

F23. No single organization in the County is assuming a leadership role in Fire Hazard Mitigation. It is not clear whose responsibility it is to minimize this County wide risk.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

CAL Fire is responsible for all wildland fire related concerns within the state responsibility areas of the county. CAL Fire works with the local jurisdictions within the county to coorenate mitigation efforts. All of the rural areas including 100%of the Felton Fire District are within the state responsibility area.

F24. The annual report to the County Board of Supervisors and the County Administrative Office by County Fire/CAL FIRE does not provide data or analysis of resources, response times, code enforcement, inspection, or education. This information is necessary to show what gaps exist between current performance and community needs in order for informed budget decisions to be made. Without adequate background information, the Board of Supervisors is unable to hold CAL FIRE accountable for the specific responsibilities specified in their contract.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

All of the fire agencies in the county, including the county fire department report their activities to the national fire incident reporting system. The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) is a reporting standard that fire departments use to uniformly report on the full range of their activities, from fire to Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to severe weather and natural disasters. We are not in a position to comment on the relationship between the county and CAL Fire in regards to contract obligations without further research.

F25. The four fire protection districts in the San Lorenzo Valley would benefit by further aligning their policies and procedures in anticipation of future consolidation.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The SLV fire districts currently are working together closely and share services, personnel, and equipment wherever possible. Any formal consolidation of agencies would only benefit the community if full time staffing was part of the agreement. Consolidation of the 4 volunteer agencies as one volunteer fire station would not result in any savings to the taxpayer or improvement of response times. Any such consolidation would likely result in a significant increase on parcel taxes to cover costs of additional full time staff. We remain open to the idea of consolidation but only if there will be clear benefits to the community.

F26. Reporting data, statistics, and formats utilized by fire agencies throughout the County are highly inconsistent, uncoordinated, and therefore not readily evaluated and compared. The standard Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating system would be useful to adopt. Response time data are not well described or consistently reported by the jurisdictions, making accurate assessment difficult, especially by other agencies or by the public.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

We are in the process of developing a dashboard for publicly displaying this information on our website, however progress is slow due to other priorities. We have published our ISO rating on our website with other information regarding our protection class. Felton Fire Protection District has an ISO rating of 4. To qualify for a 4 rating the property must be within 5 miles of the fire station and a fire hydrant within 1000 feet of the property. If the property is greater than 5 miles away from the station and a fire hydrant is more than 1000 feet away, the rating is 8.

F27. The 2015 County of Santa Cruz Emergency Operations Management plan does not adequately address evacuation, and references data too outdated to be useful, such as a population density map from the 2000 census.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

F29. The Grand Jury finds that formally specified baseline and target performance statements, in alignment with the Center for Public Safety Excellence Assessment Process, neither currently exist nor are they reported by fire departments in the County as required by best practice standards. There are no goals set or measures made of progress for review by the Board of Supervisors regarding County Fire/CAL FIRE performance. Other fire districts in the County are similarly remiss in reporting to their governing bodies. Appropriate goals would include progress on response times, vegetation management, and code inspection progress, all of which are necessary to properly quantify the budget and resources required for full-time, volunteer, and prison inmate workforces, in appropriate, affordable proportions.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE – explain the disputed portion

DISAGREE – explain why

Response explanation (required for a response other than **Agree**):

While we cannot speak to the relationship between the county and CAL Fire, Felton Fire District uses NFPA 1201 (Standard for Providing Fire and Emergency Services to the Public), The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and our records management system to monitor and set goals for the fire chief in regards to response times, training, staffing, and public education annually. We will look into accreditation process for Center for Public Safety Excellence and what benefits can be offered if any to measure performance more efficiently.

Recommendations

R1. Santa Cruz County, under the auspices of the Emergency Management Council (EMC) with LAFCO support, should study a governing structure that would tie all fire agencies in the County together with common leadership, objectives, sharing of data, and maximized use of resources. (F23, F25)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

All fire agencies already participate in monthly joint meetings under the authority of the Santa Cruz Fire Chiefs association for the purpose of aligning priorities, information sharing, and preventing the duplication of efforts. Fire Prevention, Fire Investigation, Training, Operations, EMS, and Administration all have separate groups made up of the department leadership for each topic

R4. The fire districts of Santa Cruz County should establish a plan by January 2021, to develop actionable Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) that follow the framework established by the 2018 Santa Cruz County - San Mateo County CWPP. (F2, F5, F22)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

This is already in progress and is on track to be completed sometime in 2021

R10. Santa Cruz County and Cities should create and/or update Hazard Mitigation Plans by July 1, 2021. Any new or existing plans should be updated a minimum of every three years. All plans should address wildfire risk, evacuation and shelter in place plans, emergency alerts, vegetation management, and confirm compliance with California SB 821. (F1, F2, F10, F11, F14–F16, F29)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

Efforts to identify wildfire risk and evacuation plans remain as one of the top priorities. We are committed to getting this information as soon as it has been vetted as correct and effective.

R11. The CAL FIRE Ready for Wildfire website should be actively promoted and shared within the community via all available means, including printed descriptive materials inserted into utility and property tax bills, by December 31, 2020. (F19–F21)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe
(not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

We continue to push information out via social media, print media, and public education events. We will look into providing information through utility bills.

R15. All fire districts in Santa Cruz County should coordinate with utility companies to provide information to residents, via information inserted in utility bill mailings, describing how to sign up for emergency notifications by December 31, 2020. (F19)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

We continue to push information out via social media, print media, and public education events. We will look into providing information through utility bills.

R16. Fire departments throughout the County should take an active role in encouraging communities and neighborhoods to sign up for FireWise, and be measured on their success by their respective governing boards on an annual basis. (F19–F22)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

We are currently advising 2 neighborhood associations within Felton Fire District on becoming a Fire Wise community. Unfortunately, The community group has to be the lead applicant through the submittal process and the fire service is more of an advisory role. We continue to regularly check in and offer assistance where we can to any group that shows interest in the Fire Wise program.

R18. County Fire and the fire districts within the County should evaluate whether purchase of Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRADs) would be beneficial in helping notify residents to evacuate in an emergency by December 31, 2020. (F12, F15, F17, F18)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

Due to the terrain and cost to properly cover the San Lorenzo Valley, LRADs would not be the best option for alerting. Other options will be investigated for mass notifications.

R21. County emergency planners at all levels should provide notification of evacuation routes and/or shelter-in-place options by March 31, 2021. Notification plans should be provided for when power is out and dissemination of information by wireless or internet is difficult or impossible. (F11, F14, F15, F17, F18, F27)

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED – summarize what has been done

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS – explain scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

This is an ongoing priority project and information will be released as soon as it can be verified as an effective plan that gives the resident all the tools they need to make an informed decision. We continue to educate residents to identify 2 ways out of their home and office for not only fire but flooding, and earthquake as well.

R23. Santa Cruz County and Cities should invest in an ALERTWildfire Imaging Surveillance system. Cameras should be purchased, installed, and tested to achieve full coverage of the County by the beginning of the 2021 fire season.
(F4)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain scope and timeframe
(not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

Response explanation, summary, and timeframe:

This is an ongoing project with new locations currently being identified by county agencies.

Penal Code §933.05

1. For Purposes of subdivision (b) of §933, as to each Grand Jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
 - a. the respondent agrees with the finding,
 - b. the respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
2. For purpose of subdivision (b) of §933, as to each Grand Jury recommendation, the responding person shall report one of the following actions:
 - a. the recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action,
 - b. the recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation,
 - c. the recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of the publication of the Grand Jury report, or
 - d. the recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.
3. However, if a finding or recommendation of the Grand Jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a County department headed by an elected officer, both the department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the Grand Jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her department.
4. A Grand Jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the Grand Jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the Grand Jury report that relates to that person or entity in order to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.
5. During an investigation, the Grand Jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding that investigation unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the Grand Jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.
6. A Grand Jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the Grand Jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. **No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.**