

Evacuation Terminology Working Group



California Governor's Office
Of Emergency Services

WHITE PAPER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Over the last several years, the State of California has experienced unprecedented all hazard incidents. All of these disasters share commonalities with large scale mutual aid responses, as well as large scale public evacuations. Many of these incidents have occurred on, or crossed over multiple county jurisdictional lines.

Pursuant to California Penal Code 409.5(a), state, county, and city peace officers, and other designated officials, are vested with the authority to close public and private lands, and order evacuations. Currently, no statewide common terminology for evacuation orders exists. Multiple jurisdictions utilize various terminologies for evacuations, resulting in confusion for the public and first responders. These issues have manifested with the recent disasters.

On March 4th, 2019, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services convened a law enforcement working group with representatives of FIREScope. The group consisted of CA-OES Law Branch and a law enforcement representative from every region within the state, with a goal of evaluating evacuation terminologies currently used within the state, and provide a recommendation for statewide standardized evacuation terminology.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Evacuation Terminology Working Group reviewed and assessed various terminologies used throughout the state, including the most common terminology used by many law enforcement agencies. The group unanimously recommends the following terminology for standardized use throughout the State of California:

- **Evacuation Order:** Immediate threat to life. This is a lawful order to leave now. The area is lawfully closed to public access.
- **Evacuation Warning:** Potential threat to life and/or property. Those who require additional time to evacuate, and those with pets and livestock should leave now.
- **Shelter in Place:** Go indoors. Shut and lock doors and windows. Prepare to self-sustain until further notice and/or contacted by emergency personnel for additional direction.

CONCLUSION:

Through the use of statewide standardized evacuation terminology, the lives of first responders and the public can be saved, and confusing and conflicting information can be eliminated for more efficient, effective, and timely evacuation notices. Furthermore, the use of statewide standardized evacuation terminology would enhance situational awareness and safety for outside mutual aid resources responding to incidents in other jurisdictions.