



# CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

## CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

### PRESS RELEASE

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### **California Community Colleges Launch Statewide Emergency Operations Plan During National Preparedness Month**

*SACRAMENTO, Calif.* – September is National Preparedness Month and the California Community Colleges is using the occasion to unveil a statewide Emergency Operations Plan. The comprehensive model will serve as a foundation for each of the 112 colleges to localize and build upon when preparing for area disasters.

“This statewide model is meant to be a starting place for college emergency managers to create a useful local plan without having to start from scratch,” said California Community Colleges Director of Emergency Preparedness Peter Wright. “The goal is for our colleges to be prepared for the broad range of threats we face in California.”

Emergency preparedness on community college campuses goes beyond the basic measures of ensuring equipment such as fire alarms, extinguishers and smoke detectors work. The new model will help students, faculty and staff be aware of what it truly means to be "ready" when a catastrophic event occurs.

The San Bruno fire is a timely example of how our colleges need to be prepared to respond when disaster strikes. Skyline College, located less than a mile from the epicenter of the explosion, immediately pooled its Campus Crisis Action Team to react to the situation. Mike Celeste, the director of public safety for the San Mateo Community College District, immediately analyzed the situation to make sure the students on campus for night classes were not in danger and then jumped into action.

“Our response team checked with San Bruno police and fire officials to get an update on the situation,” said Celeste. “Once we determined the fire was going away from the campus and our students were not in jeopardy, we made the decision to keep classes in session so there wouldn’t be additional cars on the streets from students leaving our site.

“This could have potentially caused blockages for the city’s public safety vehicles trying to respond to fire. We also immediately covered the Skyline College gym floors and began to prepare an emergency evacuation site in the event we were called upon by Red Cross to serve as a shelter.”

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An Emergency Operations Plan such as the one currently in place for the San Mateo Community College District is critical for each community college campus but it cannot stand alone. College emergency managers need to train administrators, staff and students on how to respond to the wide range of hazards that exist in California. Many California community colleges have an active Campus Emergency Response Team. These teams train to extinguish small fires, perform search and rescue missions, administer medical triage and basic first aid, establish on-campus community evacuation shelters, and assist college administrators in handling emergencies from bomb scares to earthquakes.

An important key to being prepared is knowing the types of local emergencies or disasters most likely to occur. The greatest threat to California's community colleges is an earthquake. Many community colleges will hold emergency response drills in September and October where they simulate disasters such as a collapsed structure and have the Campus Emergency Response Teams take action. They will practice vital skills such as responding to injured, communicating and coordinating with city and county public safety officials, notifying students and families about the incident and setting up emergency response centers.

Most community colleges will participate in the Great California Shakeout on October 21. The statewide earthquake preparedness drill that included nearly 7 million Californians in 2009, will provide community colleges with a central theme to launch their emergency notification systems and distribute useful earthquake safety information. Riverside Community College District will test its readiness to respond to a massive earthquake by participating in a mock drill that will include collapsed buildings with hundreds of faculty, staff and students injured or dead.

California's community colleges continue to train for an active shooter scenario. This training prepares faculty, staff and students to respond if shots are fired on or near a campus. Many college law enforcement officers are coached using real-time scenarios where they respond to actors shooting realistic looking firearms with non-lethal bullets.

"Real-time training is a necessary component of college emergency preparedness plans," said San Diego Community College District Police Chief Charlie Hogquist. "Whether we're preparing for an active shooter, a natural disaster or a lost child, it gives officers, faculty, staff and students a sense of their surroundings and first-hand knowledge of how to respond. These exercises are crucial in reducing panic and increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome if an actual disaster occurs."

Disaster Resistant California Community Colleges, a project funded by a grant from the California Emergency Management Agency, is leading the system statewide emergency preparedness effort and will hold regional workshops on its model plan as soon as the state budget is passed. Please contact Peter Wright for a copy of the statewide Emergency Operations Plan.

*The [California Community Colleges](http://www.cccco.edu) is the largest system of higher education in the nation. It is composed of 72 districts and 112 colleges serving 2.9 million students each year. In 2007, the Chancellor's Office first received a grant from the California Emergency Management Agency to launch the Disaster Resistant California Community Colleges Project. For additional information please visit our website at <http://emergency.cccco.edu>.*