ATTACHMENT 4

Emergency Management: Insufficient Authority and Communication Hinder Emergency Preparedness and Response in King County

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Executive Summary

King County faces significant barriers to effective emergency management. The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) has had some success over the past few years improving relationships with key stakeholders; however, it lacks the authority, visibility, and influence needed to drive emergency preparedness and response for King County. In addition, OEM's role in emergency response is not adequately defined or communicated to stakeholders. To address these issues, we recommend the County Executive, OEM, and the King County Council take steps to increase the authority and potential influence of OEM.

King County Auditor's Office

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Emergency Management: Barriers Impede Preparedness and Response

Report Highlights

June 14, 2016

Why This Audit Is Important	Emergency management plays an important role in the overall preparedness of our region to respond to emergencies and the ability of King County government to continue its essential functions. King County's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is tasked with coordinating effective emergency preparedness, response, and recovery for King County government functions and for supporting such functions in the 39 cities and towns within King County.
What We Found	King County faces significant structural barriers to effective emergency management. The Office of Emergency Management has had some success over the past few years improving relationships with key stakeholders; however, it lacks the authority, visibility, and influence needed to drive emergency preparedness and response for King County. For instance, OEM sits lower in the organizational chart than high-performing emergency management functions in comparable counties. OEM also has no statutory authority to compel county agencies to prepare for emergencies. This impacts the ability of OEM to develop relationships and exercise influence over county and regional actors. For instance, despite OEM working for more than three years to encourage county entities to complete plans that would ensure continuity of essential government functions in an emergency, some offices have yet to complete their plans. In addition, OEM's role in emergency response is not adequately defined or communicated to stakeholders, further jeopardizing key relationships as OEM delivers promises of support to localities that it may not be able to fulfill.
What We Recommend	To ensure effective emergency preparedness, response, and recovery, we recommend that the King County Council and the County Executive take steps to increase the authority and effectiveness of OEM in fulfilling its mission. These include creating specific emergency preparedness-related requirements within King County Code, considering changes to OEM's organizational placement, and requiring OEM to develop and present an annual report to County Council and the County Executive. We also present several recommendations to improve emergency management processes and outcomes.

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1. Lack of Influence and Authority

Section Summary

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) does not have sufficient influence and authority to accomplish its mission. OEM sits much lower in the King County organizational chart and has less statutory authority than comparable high-performing offices of emergency management in other counties. These factors hamper OEM's ability to build the relationships and influence it needs to ensure smooth coordination with stakeholders in disaster response. In addition, the agency has not succeeded in its efforts to encourage all King County government agencies to prepare to continue essential government functions in the event of a disaster.

OEM does not have sufficient authority to compel preparedness actions

Unlike in some other jurisdictions, OEM does not have authority within King County Code to compel emergency preparedness, resulting in varied levels of preparedness across county agencies. Lacking authority in code, OEM must instead persuade agencies to dedicate resources to preparedness actions like planning for continuity of operations, training, and participating in exercises. It has had inconsistent success, as discussed on pages 3 and 4 of this report. King County Code directs OEM to "ensure cooperation and coordination" among county agencies to provide adequate emergency preparedness, but does not require executive departments or separately elected agencies to participate in emergency management activities. Further, code does not provide a means for accountability or performance measurement. As a result, OEM does not have the authority needed to efficiently and effectively administer its emergency management program.

The Emergency Management Accreditation Program considers this type of authority a national best practice standard. [1] In order to achieve accreditation as meeting national standards, an emergency management office "should have legal statutes and regulations establishing authority for development and maintenance of the Emergency Management Program." For example, Miami-Dade County is accredited, and its code requires all departments and independent agencies to prepare and periodically revise emergency preparedness contingency plans pursuant to directions and guidelines from the Office of Emergency Management. The Miami-Dade emergency management director also has the statutory authority to mandate training of county employees.

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[1] King County is planning to undergo evaluation for Emergency Management Accreditation Program certification in 2017.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

OEM's lack of statutory authority and influence resulted in varying levels of emergency preparedness across the county

OEM's process for developing emergency preparedness within King County government is hampered by its lack of statutory authority and influence. For instance, even though OEM dedicated a staff member to work with King County agencies, it took three years for OEM to get King County executive agencies to develop and transmit emergency continuity of operations plans, which describe how essential functions will be continued and recovered in an emergency or disaster.[2] According to OEM, some agencies conducted extensive efforts to prepare for continuity of operations, including King County's Department of Information Technology, which proactively worked to identify software and network applications critical for county operations. However, other county agencies did not complete continuity plans.

Part of the problem is that while the early part of the planning effort was conducted through the Department of Executive Services, the follow-up work was done through the county's Emergency Management Coordination Committee (the committee), which is poorly attended and has not yet matured into an effective body.[3] The committee was intended to be a cohort of agency staff who are responsible for emergency management coordination in their departments and divisions and who work actively with OEM to coordinate activities across the county.

However, OEM lacks the influence and political credibility to develop the Emergency Management Coordination Committee into an effective body. For instance, only two of the 13 directors we spoke with indicated that their emergency management staff person reported to them on committee activities and engaged the department on committee tasks, such as continuity planning. County emergency managers indicated that the committee has not produced useful outputs and needs accountability from leaders. OEM managers stated that the committee could be made more effective, and it has taken steps in early 2016 to make a measurable contribution to emergency preparedness in King County. According to OEM, the committee is currently working on several important tasks, such as providing input on the:

- process to designate and communicate county employees' responsibilities in emergency situations
- development of a framework for alert and warning emergency notifications within the county

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[2] The Emergency Management Accreditation Program states "continuity of operations plans (COOP) shall identify and describe how essential functions will be continued and recovered in an emergency or disaster. The plan(s) shall identify essential positions and lines of succession, and provide for the protection or safeguarding of critical applications, communications resources, vital records/databases, process and functions that must be maintained during response activities and identify and prioritize applications, records, processes and functions to be recovered if lost…The plans address alternate operating capability and facilities."

[3] There are 25 agencies on Emergency Management Coordination Committee's attendance roster: 10 executive departments, eight divisions (of executive departments), and seven separately elected agencies. Appendix 1 has greater detail on attendance over the three-year period.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

- King County priorities for allocating federal grant funding.

Perhaps as a result of its past ineffectiveness, the group is poorly attended. For example, only three out of 25 agencies sent representatives to at least three-quarters of committee meetings between 2013 and 2015. Further, ten agencies sent representatives to less than 20 percent of meetings. See Appendix 1 for attendance details. The committee's lack of defined outputs combined with insufficient statutory authority to require county agencies to plan for emergencies made it difficult for OEM to ensure that the essential functions of the county will be maintained in a disaster.

Recommendation 1

The County Executive should recommend legislation to the County Council to formalize the role of the Emergency Management Coordination Committee, defining it as the emergency management coordinating body for King County, led by the Office of Emergency Management and requiring participation by the emergency manager or designee from each county department and separately-elected office.

OEM has not evaluated emergency plans; some agencies have not tested them

OEM has not reviewed continuity of operations plans submitted in 2012 and 2013 for quality or checked to make sure they are not depending on the same resources, such as alternate work locations. OEM managers indicated that this work has been delayed due to limited resources. OEM has assigned a staff member to evaluate agencies' plans according to national standards.[4]

Agencies are supposed to train staff and test their plan in the form of a tabletop exercise each year, according to King County's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.[5] Plans are also supposed to be updated annually to make sure information such as line of succession is current, as well as incorporate any improvement identified through tabletop exercises. Some departments conducted exercises in 2014; however, OEM is not aware of any having updated their plans with lessons learned. Furthermore, one plan was developed in 1998; it is nearing 20 years old. See Exhibit A for more information. If not practiced and refined, plans are of limited value in emergency situations.

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[4] Nationally recognized Emergency Management Accreditation Program standards mandate that plans identify essential positions and lines of succession. They also require safeguarding and recovery of critical applications, communications resources, vital records, processes, and functions that must be maintained during response activities.

[5] The Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan is required by state law. It provides a framework for Emergency Support Functions covering detailed information for conduct of the county emergency mitigation and preparedness program and the county's response and recovery efforts.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

Exhibit A: Some King County agencies are not prepared to continue operations in an emergency and none of the plans meet expectations for annual exercising and update.

Agency	Continuity of Operations Plan Provided to OEM	Required Annual Update Completed	Most Recent Tabletop Exercise Conducted
Adult and Juvenile Detention	✓	✗	✗
Community and Human Services	✓	✗	2014
Economic and Financial Analysis	✓	✗	✗
Executive Services	✓	✗	2015
Information Technology	✓	✗	2015
Judicial Administration	✓	✗	2014
Natural Resources and Parks	✓	✗	2014
Permitting and Environmental Review	✓	✗	2014
Public Defense	✗ a	-	-
Public Health	✓	✗	✗
Transportation	✓	✗	2014
Assessor	✓	✗	✗
Council	✗	-	-
Elections	✓	✗	✗
Prosecuting Attorney	✗	-	-
District Court	✓	✗	✗
Superior Court	✓	✗	✗
Sheriff	✗	-	-

a The document the Department of Public Defense (DPD) submitted to OEM was not a continuity of operations plan. DPD has not responded to OEM's or our requests for its actual continuity of operations plan.
Source: King County Auditor's Office and OEM.

OEM stated that it is working to increase cooperation with the Sheriff's Office, which is a key player in emergency response. Despite requirements in its own General Orders Manual, the Sheriff has not developed continuity of operations plans for any of its sections or precincts.[6] In addition, the Sheriff's deputy who was assigned to emergency management was primarily reassigned to support patrol operations in fall 2014. Now the deputy spends 15-20 percent of his time on emergency management work. He reports that his other duties interfere with his ability to attend Emergency Management Coordination Committee meetings. This could indicate vulnerabilities in the Sheriff's ability to coordinate with OEM and other county agencies while responding to other emergencies. The

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[6] The Sheriff's General Orders Manual requires continuity of operations plans for the Patrol Operations, Criminal Investigations, Technical Services, Special Ops, and Communications sections, as well as each of the three precincts and 16 contract cities. Sheriff's Office staff indicated that none of these documents had been developed as of the time of our review.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

Sheriff has a significant number of responsibilities in disaster situations.[7] As shown in Exhibit A, some of the other separately elected agencies in King County also lack continuity of operations plans.

The Sheriff's Office is the only agency with prime responsibility for essential emergency functions that does not have a continuity of operations plan. While the Sheriff's Office has a plan that outlines response activities, OEM acknowledges that it lacks critical elements of a continuity of operations plan, such as when to activate the plan and alternate locations for command posts. Both OEM and the Sheriff's Office staff state that the Sheriff's Office is well practiced in responding to emergencies; however, a continuity of operations plan is essential to full preparedness.

Recommendation 2	The County Executive should develop and propose to the County Council specific emergency preparedness-related requirements for King County Code and/or Executive Orders for all county departments and separately-elected offices, related to:

   a. development of continuity of operations plans

   b. annual plan reviews, exercises, and updates

   c. designation of a departmental emergency management liaison (with emergency management as an express function in its job description) as the employee responsible for leading compliance with continuity of operations plan requirements and coordination between the department and the Office of Emergency Management and other county functions.

Recommendation 3	As a key player in emergency response, the King County Sheriff's Office should work with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to develop a continuity of operations plan that meets requirements determined by OEM, and provide it to OEM by November 15, 2016.

OEM lacks a means to hold county agencies accountable for lax preparedness

OEM does not have a mechanism to motivate county agencies to engage in preparedness activities or to hold them accountable for their lack of preparedness. Best practices in emergency management state that motivation is important to encourage agencies to participate in emergency management planning, training, and exercises. For example, Miami-Dade County Code requires an annual emergency preparedness report to its board of commissioners and mayor. The report provides an avenue for

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[7] King County's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan assigns the Sheriff's Office responsibilities such as providing evacuations, crowd control, search and rescue, aerial reconnaissance, Emergency Coordination Center security, protecting vital resources, and controlling restricted areas.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

accountability to inform policy-makers on the status of the ability of Miami-Dade County to prepare for, respond to, and manage disasters and emergencies.

An annual report would provide such a mechanism by communicating to the County Council, the County Executive, and the public an evaluation of the status of preparedness efforts across the county. Specifically, it could indicate which agencies have completed continuity of operations plans, and trained, exercised, and updated them with lessons learned. As shown in Exhibit A above, separately elected agencies have done comparatively little emergency planning, so the transparency and accountability afforded by an annual report could potentially motivate them to participate.

Recommendation 4

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) should develop and present an annual report to the County Council and County Executive on the status of emergency management in King County prior to budget proposals, including the status of continuity of operations plan development, updates, training, and exercises across all county agencies, and any other elements OEM deems appropriate, especially those that can be quantitatively assessed over time, such as participation in trainings and exercises.

OEM quadrupled regional stakeholder partipation in key planning effort since 2009

In contrast to the challenges OEM has experienced motivating county agencies to participate in emergency planning activities, it has seen success in its efforts to convene stakeholders in regional planning. For example, OEM worked with 54 local governments, including King County, 26 city and town governments, and 27 special purpose districts to update the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan as of July 2014.[8] The plan states that the 2009 update process was truncated after back-to-back flooding and snow storm disasters and the emergence of a significant flooding threat due to problems at Howard Hanson Dam. The truncated process resulted in a significant decrease in the number of planning partners covered by the regional plan (12 local governments). Many of the original planning partners developed their own plans or let their plans expire, marking a decline in OEM's influence and credibility in the region. As shown in Exhibit B, current OEM leaders have worked hard to build back relationships with local governments and restore regional commitment toward collaborative emergency preparedness and resilience.

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[8] King County and a partnership of local governments within the county developed and maintained a regional hazard mitigation plan to reduce risks from natural disasters. The plan complies with hazard mitigation planning requirements to maintain eligibility for funding under Federal Emergency Management Agency grant programs.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

Exhibit B: OEM renewed stakeholder participation in regional hazard mitigation planning between 2009 and 2014.
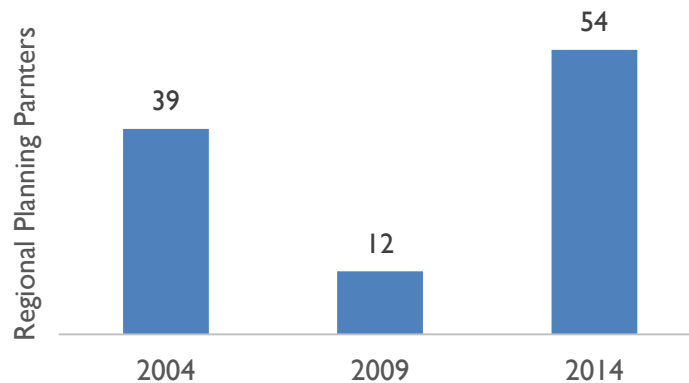
Source: King County Auditor's Office

OEM's organizational placement hinders relationship-building and influence over county agencies

OEM's organizational placement within the Department of Executive Services diminishes its visibility and influence, making it difficult for OEM to create and maintain relationships with King County agencies. Exhibit D depicts OEM's organizational placement and reporting structure.

Research by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) found that the emergency management function must have sufficient status and authority to obtain the attention, cooperation, and respect of other agency personnel, see Exhibit C.[9] Training by the Federal Emergency Management Agency indicates that an effective emergency management organization should report directly to the county executive and have a horizontal linkage with other departments such as public works. OEM does not have a horizontal relationship with other departments and does not have sufficient status and authority to be effective.

> ### Exhibit C: ICMA Key Characteristics of Effective Emergency Management Programs
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> - Emergency management function has status and authority
> - Manager is a strong leader and has respect of key officials
> - Manager meets regularly with department heads
> - Motivation is provided for participation in program
> - Emergency preparedness is an ongoing activity

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[9] The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) identified key characteristics that contribute to effective emergency management after reviewing the operations of more than 300 local government emergency management agencies. The Public Entity Risk Institute compiled them in its 2009 publication *Characteristics of Effective Emergency Management Organizational Structures*. Selected characteristics are listed in Exhibit C.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

Exhibit D: Several organizational layers separate the Office of Emergency Management from County Executive.
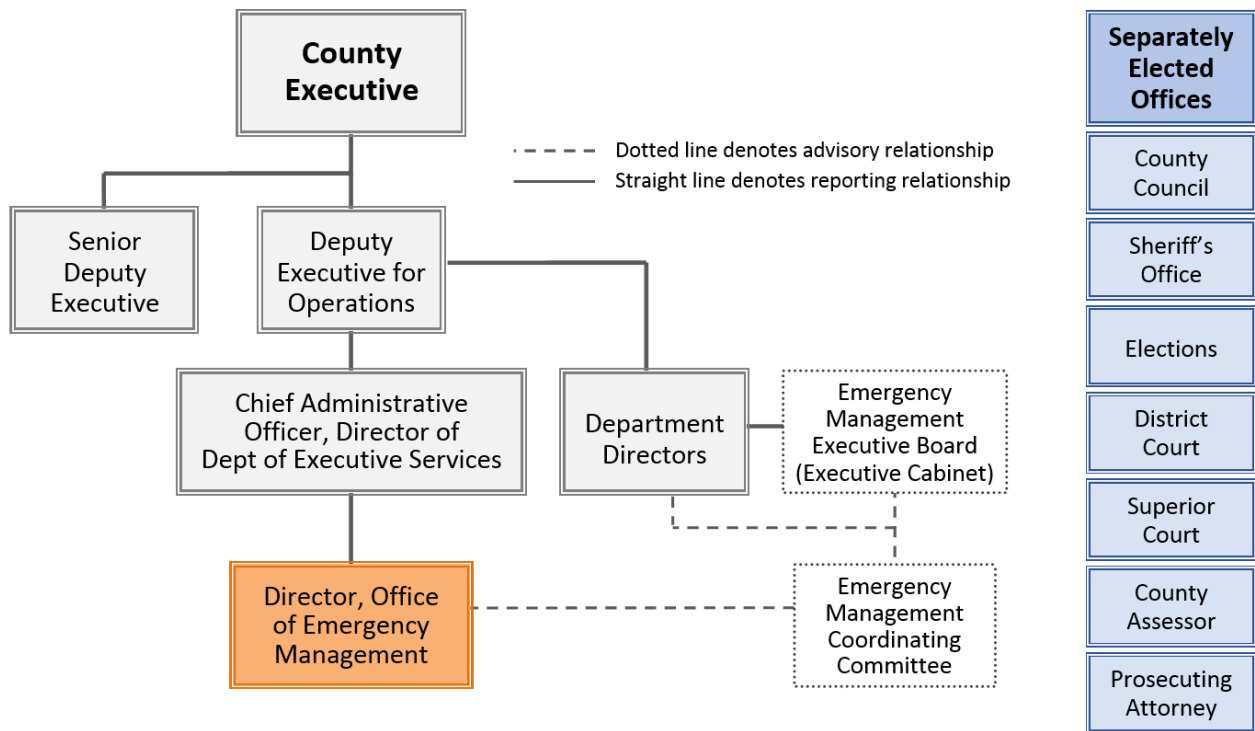
Note: Until a reorganization in February 2016, OEM was four layers removed from the County Executive.
Source: King County Auditor's Office

OEM lacks the influence and political credibility to make the county's internal emergency management work group an effective body

OEM is unable to reliably advance countywide emergency planning efforts through the Emergency Management Coordination Committee. The committee was intended to be a cohort of agency staff responsible for emergency management coordination in their departments and divisions that works actively with OEM to coordinate activities across the county. However, OEM staff indicated that many representatives view the committee as a place where OEM informs them about emergency management information, not as a working group. OEM staff and active committee representatives depend on voluntary collaboration from participants who have other primary job duties. Consequently, other than participating in efforts to develop continuity of operation plans, the committee has had few defined outputs. Important projects related to its continuity of government work—such as Facility Management Division's alternate workspace identification effort—depend entirely on the interest and willingness of committee representatives to participate, requiring OEM's time and resources in championing innovative efforts.[10]

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[10] The Facilities Management Division, through the Emergency Management Coordination Committee, is piloting a process to obtain specific space-related needs information for alternative worksites for selected Department of Executive Services divisions and executive departments, thereby allowing for coordination among entities regarding locations. The work completed to date is the information request form, not an alternative worksite plan.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

Many department and division directors we interviewed believed that the person within their department or division designated as being responsible for their agency's emergency management was coordinating with OEM via the committee. In some cases that was true, but in others we found that the key department- and division-level emergency managers did not engage with OEM via the committee. Some directors indicated that they did not think the structures OEM had in place to facilitate intra-government collaboration were effective.
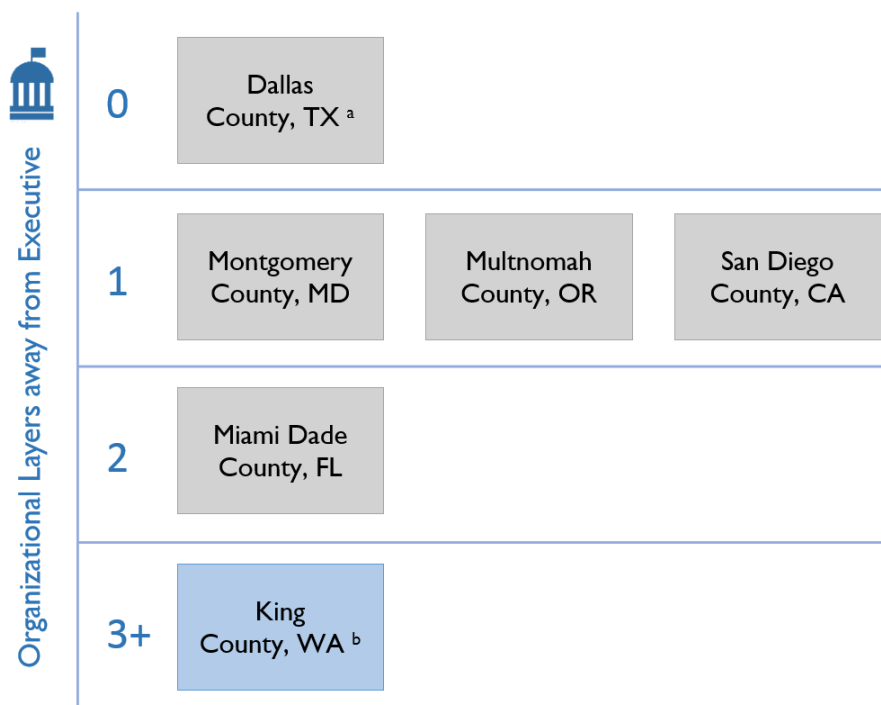
Directors from high-performing emergency management jurisdictions agreed that the closer the emergency management function is placed to the county executive, the more efficiently the office can operate. The King County OEM director does not have regular access to the County Executive, and therefore cannot borrow that authority to push emergency management activities as a priority for county agencies. OEM has struggled through these structural barriers presented by its low organizational placement to try to build relationships and lead the county toward a position of readiness and resilience. In contrast, emergency management directors in comparable jurisdictions identified their organizational placement at the department level as a factor in their success. For instance, they indicated their peer relationships with department directors were helpful in ensuring preparedness and response actions were completed. As one high-performing emergency management director articulated, "without visibility, access to top leadership, and delegated authority, the work of the emergency manager will not be as effective."

High-performing offices of emergency management in comparable jurisdictions have fewer organizational layers separating the emergency management office from top county executives.[11] Exhibit E compares King County's organizational placement with comparable jurisdictions in terms of number of reporting layers separating the emergency management function from the top executive.

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[11] We interviewed emergency management directors from five counties comparable to King County in terms of their population, number of cities and unincorporated areas, number of federally declared disasters, and whether they were in a home rule state: San Diego County, Calif., Miami Dade County, Fla., Montgomery County, Md., Multnomah County, Ore., and Dallas County, Texas. Most were identified as high-performing by local emergency management professionals, and three are certified by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

Exhibit E: King County's Office of Emergency Management is lower in the organization than comparable counties.

Organizational Layers away from Executive

0	Dallas County, TX [a]
1	Montgomery County, MD	Multnomah County, OR	San Diego County, CA
2	Miami Dade County, FL
3+	King County, WA [b]

[a] Dallas County's emergency management agency is placed in the Office of the Executive.
[b] King County had four organizational layers between OEM and the County Executive until February 2016.
Source: Comparison jurisdictions and King County Auditor's Office

More than one director indicated that they would be disinclined to apply for a job at King County OEM, because the organizational structure would make it difficult to be successful. This indicates that in addition to creating challenges for OEM to operate effectively, the organizational placement could act as a deterrent to recruiting talented emergency management professionals.

Recommendation 5

The County Executive should develop, document, and implement a plan to provide the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) with the visibility, leadership, and relationships necessary to effectively and efficiently drive the county's emergency preparedness and response activities. The plan should include implementation timeframes and consideration of making OEM an executive-level department or incorporating it into the Office of the Executive if other strategies do not achieve the desired outcomes.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

King County's designated emergency manager is not a trained emergency management professional

Not only is the OEM director too far removed from the County Executive to provide timely professional expertise, but also he is not the county's designated emergency manager. According to the county's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, the designated emergency manager is tasked with providing emergency management functions. In an emergency, the person in charge of managing the situation should have extensive knowledge, experience, and expertise in the emergency management discipline. But in King County, the designated emergency manager is the director of the Department of Executive Services, not the OEM director. The director of the Department of Executive Services is not an emergency management professional, and because of numerous other duties associated with the nine other agencies she manages, cannot devote a consistently high level of attention to emergency management issues. As a result, emergency management professionals in OEM have to work through another organizational layer, introducing inefficiencies that could have negative outcomes, especially in time-sensitive situations.

Recommendation 6

The County Executive should amend the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan to designate the director of the Office of Emergency Management as the County Emergency Manager and propose related revisions for County Code section 2.56.030 to the County Council.

Recommendation 7

The County Executive should require that the designated County Emergency Manager be a certified emergency manager or have comparably significant emergency management experience and sufficient capacity to dedicate a consistent and substantial percentage of work time to emergency management activities.

OEM's use of term-limited temporary employees may be inconsistent with county policy

OEM relies on term-limited temporary (TLT) employees to fulfill core mission work, which is not in compliance with county contingent worker policy and may hurt recruitment and retention. Over a quarter of OEM's staff are TLTs (5 out of 19). Of these five employees, four are performing ongoing core programmatic work: the training and exercise manager, the public educator, the point person for all operational planning efforts, and the finance manager, who supervises a staff of three people. This may conflict with the county's contingent worker policy. Furthermore, two of these key employees are nearing the time limit for temporary positions. Losing these key employees would be a major setback for OEM, because they are highly valued and embody a large amount of specific knowledge gained through experience working in King County.

1. Lack of Influence and Authority

Recommendation 8   The Office of Emergency Management and the Human Resources Division of the Department of Executive Services should reclassify Office of Emergency Management employees performing ongoing program functions from term-limited temporary to career service employees.

2. Disaster Response

Section Summary

OEM has made positive strides towards regional collaboration, but lacks a record of coordinating King County resources in emergency response situations-calling into question the county's operational preparedness for a major regional disaster. An essential role of OEM is to coordinate King County agencies and regional partners in responding to disasters. The County has responsibility for providing emergency response in unincorporated areas, as well as responsibility for assisting cities within the county when circumstances exceed their local response capacity.[12] However, OEM does not have an established record of leading county agencies in providing effective emergency response or in leveraging county resources to assist jurisdictions who have surpassed their local capabilities. Evidence suggests that the county may not be sufficiently ready, operationally, for major disasters requiring significant coordination and collaboration.

OEM has improved relationships and regional preparedness in recent years

OEM has advanced a number of positive operational and planning efforts in recent years, increasing regional disaster preparedness. OEM has invigorated relationships with King County's 39 cities, and engaged partners in the private and non-profit sectors, to increase resiliency across the county. OEM's recent accomplishments include:

- updating key county emergency management plans, including the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
- leading development of the region's participation in a multi-state training exercise, "Cascadia Rising," that will involve the Federal Emergency Management Agency and partners throughout the Pacific Northwest in simulating response to a major Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake[13]
- developing an interjurisdictional emergency aid request format now used statewide
- seeking accreditation from the Emergency Management Accreditation Program, an independent peer review process intended to ensure measurable standards of excellence for emergency management programs.

These efforts reflect OEM's ongoing commitment to strengthening regional emergency preparation and response.

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[12] There are 39 cities in King County comprising the majority of King County's 2.1 million residents; seven Community Service Areas represent roughly the 255,000 residents of unincorporated King County.
[13] The Cascadia Subduction Zone carries a risk of a 9+ magnitude earthquake off the Pacific Coast of Oregon, Washington, and/or British Columbia, with catastrophic effects to Pacific Northwest communities.

2. Disaster Response

Source: King County Auditor's Office

OEM's day-to-day work activities may not be aligned with its defined mission

The main focus of OEM's efforts may not be fully aligned with its defined mission, limiting its success in directing response in emergencies. Under county code, OEM's mission includes the "effective direction, control, and coordination of county government emergency services function[s]" and serves as the coordinator for cities, county departments, and other appropriate agencies during regional disasters. In practice, however, OEM primarily acts as a liaison for regional emergency preparedness. For instance, stakeholders report OEM is strong in providing planning assistance to cities and interacting with the state emergency management agency. OEM also provides training and exercises and conducts public outreach focused on general preparedness education. In 2016, OEM acknowledged that its lack of emphasis on coordinating emergency response may have caused confusion about its role in meeting the emergency management needs of King County government and in unincorporated areas of the county. OEM managers indicated that they are beginning to focus more on operations—the direction and control of county response functions.

OEM was ineffective in coordinating assistance during a recent emergency

In November 2015, OEM did not effectively coordinate emergency response by King County agencies and provide assistance to rural county residents during South Fork Skykomish River flooding. A winter storm led to a loss of power, downed trees, impassible roads, and flooding through the area around Skykomish; Highway 2 east of town was closed, and cities downstream in Snohomish County were also flooded. Skykomish students, unable to reach their homes, spent the night in their school without heat or light. The town's emergency shelter (the school) did not have power

to run the sewer and water systems at the same time. King County's Water and Land Resources Division categorized the flood as a Phase 4 Major Flooding event, its most severe designation. The chief of the Skykomish Fire District (King County Fire District #50) called OEM to request assistance in coordinating the disaster response.[14]

Lack of established procedures resulted in confusion and frustration

However, OEM did not immediately provide help. It did not elect to increase the activation level of the Emergency Coordination Center (ECC), and its efforts to coordinate with other county departments in response to community needs did not go smoothly. OEM was able to provide the community some information on when power might be restored and roads cleared from response agencies such as Puget Sound Energy, Washington State Department of Transportation, and King County's Road Services Division. However, confusion from different local entities requesting resources and the lack of established procedures for OEM staff to track and respond to requests resulted in confusion and frustration. Instead, local leaders worked directly with county departments for response needs, despite a community impact just short of qualifying as a federal disaster.[15]

Exhibit G: Flood monitor inspecting damaged road near town of Skykomish.

Note: This road–the Old Cascade Highway–was initially damaged in the January 2011 flood event. This picture was taken after the November 2015 flood event to inspect for any additional damage that may have occurred.
Source: Water and Land Resources Division

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[14] King County Fire District #50 serves both incorporated and unincorporated northeast King County, including the unincorporated communities of Baring and Grotto, and the town of Skykomish. Skykomish is the sole incorporated town within the Fire District.
[15] This episode of flooding was later found to barely miss the threshold for Federal disaster assistance of about $7 million.

2. Disaster Response

Shortly after the November flooding, a second severe storm threatened rural King County in early December. OEM drafted a review of its actions in the November and December 2015 storms. The report states that OEM experienced major challenges in providing support to local jurisdictions and gathering and providing information on the impacts of the emergency to county departments and local jurisdictions. Challenges included lack of procedures on staff deployment to emergency locations, poor internal communication, and inaccurate situational awareness reports. OEM drafted corrective actions and an improvement plan to address these challenges.

Limited ECC activation constrains county preparedness

Prior to December 2015, OEM stated that it had not activated the ECC in almost four years, limiting practice of its essential role during a regional emergency. During a disaster, emergency management response is coordinated through a jurisdiction's ECC. Jurisdictions with well-organized ECCs have advantages over other jurisdictions during an emergency.[16] To ensure operational preparedness, high-performing jurisdictions activate their centers frequently-not just for disasters, but also for large planned events and in support of other jurisdictions. Doing so allows practice and reinforcement of critical processes and skills needed in responding to emergencies.

Conversely, not activating the ECC causes skills and relationships to languish, making mistakes and inefficiencies more likely when real emergencies occur. OEM leadership activated the ECC in December 2015 in response to a winter storm and anticipated flooding, and supports activating the ECC more frequently going forward. In addition, OEM states that it regularly conducts trainings of King County staff and external partners on ECC activation. Finally, OEM staff members participated in late 2015 and early 2016 at emergency activations in other locales, including Seattle and Spokane.

Recommendation 9

The Office of Emergency Management should ensure full Emergency Coordination Center activation on at least an annual basis, whether for natural disaster, planned event, or full scale exercise incorporating key partners.

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[16] FEMA Emergency Management Institute specifies resolving problems at the lowest practical level and providing strategic guidance and direction to support incident management activities as examples of advantages gained by well-organized ECCs.

2. Disaster Response

OEM does not currently perform its intra-departmental coordination function in many county emergencies. King County's most frequent federally declared disasters are severe storms and flooding, yet OEM's role is limited in these situations (See Appendix 2 for more information on federally-declared disasters in King County since 1990). Under the county code, OEM is charged with leading coordination of county departments in emergency response. However, per the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, the Water and Land Resources Division carries the county's lead role in flood management and response.[17] During flooding events, the Sheriff's Office, and the Road Services and Water and Land Resources Divisions are primary responders, and each already has coordination and communication processes in place.

For example, during a winter snowstorm several years ago, the Road Services director called on the Parks director to ask for help plowing because Road Services was short-handed. According to the Road Services director, their strong relationship facilitated quick collaboration. However, barring ECC activation, departments and divisions reported that they operate independently of OEM. Consequently, significant emergency response often occurs without OEM's knowledge or participation, which could result in confusion, inefficiency, and lengthening recovery time as disasters escalate in severity.

Although the directors of departments and divisions directly responsible for King County emergency response activities expressed support for OEM and its role, OEM does not have strong direct relationships with the divisions that perform those activities in local disasters.[18] Key divisions, including Water and Land Resources, Road Services, and the Sheriff's Office, indicated that they do not consistently participate with OEM in planning or training exercises. In some cases, this may be partly due to resource constraints. OEM also does not participate in internal exercises with these divisions. County staff questioned the level of knowledge and collaboration among OEM and key county response divisions regarding one another's operations, possibly hindering OEM's ability to assist and coordinate among these agencies during a larger-scale regional emergency.

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[17] According to the Water and Land Resources Division, their flood warning system has been in place for over 50 years. When active, the Flood Warning Center has a 64-person team of communications and field monitoring staff. The center activates an average of six times per year during potential flood events. Water and Land also conducts outreach to citizens during Flood Awareness Month every October.
[18] We interviewed the directors of the Departments of Transportation, Public Health, Information Technology, Natural Resources and Parks, Community and Health Services, as well as the King County Sheriff. We also interviewed the directors of the Facilities Management, Road Services, Water and Land Resources, Wastewater Treatment, Parks, Human Resources, and Transit Divisions.

2. Disaster Response

For instance, during the November 2015 Skykomish flooding, Water and Land Resources sent two teams to Skykomish to assess impacts immediately after the flood event and directly contacted the town's mayor to offer assistance. In contrast, OEM did not send staff to assess the situation until a week following the emergency.

Recommendation 10

The Office of Emergency Management should continue to develop, document, and proactively implement a plan to develop relationships with leaders and staff in King County departments and divisions that regularly conduct emergency response, specifically, the King County Sheriff's Office, and the Road Services and Water and Land Resources Divisions.

OEM does not have a clear threshold for when it provides emergency assistance

OEM could not articulate a clear standard for when it provides emergency assistance. For example, some OEM staff expressed a "just call us, we're here to help" message. Others articulated the threshold for emergency activation as a request from two cities or two county departments. Still others expressed hesitation about directly aiding cities, given the cost and cities' primary role for emergency management under state law. OEM has acknowledged this gap and is developing a new plan that clearly defines ECC activation levels, roles of duty officers, and emergency assistance. When completed, OEM intends to share the plan with the entire emergency management community and conduct trainings and exercises to familiarize stakeholders with its contents.

Inconsistent messaging can jeopardize key relationships if OEM creates expectations or delivers promises of support that it cannot fulfill. Emergency management professionals stress the value of collaborative relationships—building trust and facilitating communication—as critical to their work. Of the ten department and division directors we asked, all ten emphasized the importance of relationships in facilitating collaboration in emergencies. Conversely, relationships are damaged if emergency managers fail to meet expectations or commitments.

OEM leadership recognizes the importance of relationship-building as fundamental to their work, and have identified specific strategies–assigning staff liaisons to cities and seeking zone coordinator funding–as positive examples of regional relationship building. However, these valuable relationships can be hampered when expectations for assistance are not met.

2. Disaster Response

Recommendation 11	The Office of Emergency Management should continue its efforts to identify and clearly document the thresholds for emergency coordination center activation and elevation, and communicate them to stakeholders.

OEM's role is not adequately defined, especially in rural areas

County leaders and OEM staff reported different concepts of OEM's role in responding to regional emergencies. Most of the 13 King County department and division directors we spoke with were unclear about OEM's mission. Many cited regional coordination of stakeholders, but did not mention continuity of operations for county government or coordinating county agencies in disaster response. OEM staff also reportedly present varying interpretations of OEM's mission to citizen and stakeholder groups.

OEM's confusion about its operational role extends to rural areas. OEM provides general preparedness information at annual community service area open houses, but other engagement with rural county residents seems limited. Community leaders noted rural preparation and coordination activities as an area of concern. OEM management characterized these communities as resilient, without noting that there are significant differences in organizational capabilities among them.[19] OEM did not identify any planning or training activities directed at unincorporated King County entities. Given their direct dependence on county functions for emergency response, rural King County communities may be particularly vulnerable to confusion within OEM about its operational response role.

In 2015, OEM developed a "clarity map" that describes its mission, vision, outcomes, and objectives. OEM plans to vet this material with internal and external stakeholders.

Recommendation 12	The Office of Emergency Management should build on its initial efforts to clarify its mission, vision, and goals. This process should clearly identify its leadership role in, and goals for:
	  a. King County government preparedness
	  b. disaster response in unincorporated King County
	  c. regional emergency management coordination.

Recommendation 13	The Office of Emergency Management should clearly document and communicate its mission and goals to partners and stakeholders within each of the leadership roles in Recommendation 12.

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[19] When asked about emergency preparedness and response in rural and unincorporated areas, OEM staff cited Vashon Island as a model for rural communities–an area with a median family income almost three times greater than Skykomish ($69,750 to $26,979). See http://www.city-data.com/county/King_County-WA.html

Appendix I

Poor Emergency Management Coordination Committee Attendance

We conducted an analysis of sign in sheets for Emergency Management Coordination Committee (EMCC) meetings held between 2013 and 2015.

EMCC Meeting Attendance by Agency 2013-2015							
Agency	2013	2014	2015	Total	% 2013	% 2014	% 2015	3 Yr % Attendance
DPH	8	9	7	24	100%	100%	100%	100%
KCIT	8	9	5	22	100%	100%	71%	90%
DNRP	6	8	6	20	75%	89%	86%	83%
DNRP-WTD	6	8	3	17	75%	89%	43%	69%
DPER	3	6	6	15	38%	67%	86%	63%
DAJD	3	7	5	15	38%	78%	71%	62%
DNRP-SWD	4	5	2	11	50%	56%	29%	45%
DOT - Transit	0	5	5	10	0%	56%	71%	42%
DES	7	3	0	10	88%	33%	0%	40%
Assessments	1	5	3	9	13%	56%	43%	37%
DOT	6	2	0	8	75%	22%	0%	32%
Sheriff	3	5	0	8	38%	56%	0%	31%
DES - HRD	1	1	4	6	13%	11%	57%	27%
Council	3	2	1	6	38%	22%	14%	25%
DJA	0	0	5	5	0%	0%	71%	24%
DES-FMD	0	0	4	4	0%	0%	57%	19%
Elections	4	0	0	4	50%	0%	0%	17%
DNRP-WLRD	0	0	2	2	0%	0%	29%	10%
Executive	0	0	2	2	0%	0%	29%	10%
District Court	0	2	0	2	0%	22%	0%	7%
DNRP-Parks	0	2	0	2	0%	22%	0%	7%
DCHS	0	0	1	1	0%	0%	14%	5%
Exec-OLR	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%
PAO	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%
Superior Court	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%
					Average Attendance			
Meetings Held	8	9	7	24	32%	35%	35%	34%

Appendix 2

Federally-Declared Disasters in King County between 1990 and 2015

There have been 18 federally-declared disasters in King County since 1990. Of these, 16 have been storm events and 13 have specifically involved flooding. When the President declares a major disaster, government agencies—including counties—may be eligible for disaster assistance. Under the Stafford Act (a federal law), a community requesting federal assistance must prove it has been overwhelmed by events. Not only must local governments be overwhelmed, but state capabilities must be overwhelmed as well. Any request to the president for federal assistance must reflect how local capabilities have been exceeded. State and federal officials conduct a preliminary damage assessment to estimate the extent of the disaster. This information is included in the governor's request to show that the disaster is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and the local governments and that federal assistance is necessary.

Declaration Date	Type of Disaster	Storm	Flood	Other
March 5, 2012	Severe Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides	✓	✓	
March 25, 2011	Severe Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides	✓	✓	
March 2, 2009	Severe Storm, Record Snow	✓	-	
Jan. 30, 2009	Severe Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides	✓	✓	
Dec. 8, 2007	Severe Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides	✓	✓	
Feb. 14, 2007	Severe Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides	✓	-	
Dec. 12, 2006	Severe Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides	✓	✓	
Sept. 7, 2005	Hurricane Katrina Evacuation[a]	-	-	✓
Nov. 7, 2003	Severe Storm, Flooding	✓	✓	
March 1, 2001	Nisqually Earthquake	-	-	✓
April 2, 1997	Severe Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides	✓	✓	
Jan. 17, 1997	Severe Storm, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides	✓	✓	
Feb. 9, 1996	Severe Storm, High Wind, and Flooding	✓	✓	
Jan. 3, 1996	Severe Storm, High Wind, and Flooding	✓	✓	
March 4, 1993	Severe Storm, High Wind	✓	-	
March 8, 1991	Severe Storm, Flooding, High Tides	✓	✓	
Nov. 26, 1990	Severe Storm, Flooding	✓	✓	
Jan. 18, 1990	Severe Storm, Flooding	✓	✓	

[a] Hurricane Katrina was declared an emergency for King County in order to allow the county to be able to receive federal funds to assist evacuees who had relocated to King County.

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency

Appendix 3

Comparison Jurisdictions Data and Information

We identified Emergency Management functions from five counties that are comparable to King County in terms of their population, number of cities and unincorporated areas, number of federally declared disasters, and whether they were in a home rule state: San Diego County, Calif., Miami Dade County, Fla., Montgomery County, Md., Multnomah County, Ore., and Dallas County, Tex. See below for additional information on these jurisdictions.

Jurisdiction	EMAP Certification	2012 Population	Number of Cities	Number of FEMA Declared Emergencies since 1990	Unincorporated Area
King County, Wash.	-	2,007,440	39	18	82% of land area; 20 percent of population
Dallas County, Tex.	-	2,453,843	31	18	One small area
Miami Dade County, Fla.	✓	2,591,035	35	9	16 unincorporated regions
Montgomery County, Md.	✓	1,004,709	19	14	7 unincorporated regions
Multnomah County, Ore.	-	776,712	8	5	12 unincorporated regions
San Diego County, Calif.	✓	3,177,063	18	27	Dozens of unincorporated regions

Sources: Emergency Management Accreditation Program, US Census, Federal Emergency Management Agency

Executive Response

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KING COUNTY AUDITOR
MAY 05 2016
RECEIVED

May 5, 2016

Kymber Waltmunson
King County Auditor
Room 1033
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Ms. Waltmunson:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed final report *"Emergency Management: Insufficient Authority and Communication Hinder Emergency Preparedness and Response in King County."* I appreciate the work your office has done on this subject, both within King County government and among our many partners in emergency management, as we seek to build ever-more resilient communities.

We concur with the audit recommendations and appreciate the acknowledgement in your report of the numerous steps that have been taken to implement improvements in line with recognized best practices. Over the past five years, the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) has been engaged in a comprehensive transformation of its internal organization, its services to King County government and our many partners in the public and private sectors. Despite a dramatic reduction in federal support for emergency preparedness, OEM has been able to expand and enhance its catalog of services. Most recently, OEM has lent technical assistance to several jurisdictions, including the cities of Kenmore, Woodinville and Lake Forest Park as they dealt with the dissolution of the Emergency Services Coordinating Agency (ESCA). At the request of local jurisdictions, OEM is assuming contract management services for two regional homeland security coordinators. The recently updated Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan includes over 50 partnering jurisdictions which is a five-fold increase over the previously approved plan. This summer OEM will be a major player in "Cascadia Rising 2016," a fully-functional exercise built around a simulated 9.0 Cascadia Subduction Zone mega-quake, involving over six thousand participants from the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia. These examples demonstrate both the developing organizational maturity of OEM as well as significant advances in regional reputation and trust.

Kymber Waltmunson
May 5, 2016
Page 2

We will continue to focus our efforts at OEM to improve our capabilities and services.
Please see the attached table for detailed responses to each audit recommendation, including
important conditions that should be considered as we move forward. Among these is the
pending review of OEM capabilities as King County seeks national accreditation through the
Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP). The process requires an internal
vetting of virtually all OEM programs, policies and practices reviewed in your audit. The
EMAP process will be critical to informing our effort to meet the intent of many of your
recommendations. Budgetary impacts must also be carefully considered in regards to your
recommendations on reorganizing OEM, planning and reporting requirements, and
reclassification of employee positions.

On the matter of increasing the visibility and impact of the Office of Emergency
Management, Walt Hubbard, Director of the Office of Emergency Management is a member
of the Operations Cabinet. The Operations Cabinet meets monthly and includes
representation of all separately elected organizations in addition to all departments and many
key operational divisions such as the Facilities Management Division of the Department of
Executive Services. I also have asked Walt to work with my Executive Leadership Team and
others to propose changes in policies and practices to strengthen the role of our Emergency
Management Coordinating Committee (EMCC) and the implementation and maintenance of
COOP plans throughout county government.

Thank you again for your important work on behalf of King County. If you have any
questions regarding our audit response, please contact Caroline Whalen, County
Administrative Officer, Department of Executive Services at 206-263-9750.

Sincerely,

Dow Constantine
King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: Fred Jarrett, Deputy County Executive, King County Executive Office (KCEO)
        Rhonda Berry, Chief of Operations, KCEO
        Caroline Whalen, County Administrative Officer, Department of Executive Services (DES)
        Walt Hubbard, Director, Office of Emergency Management (DES)

Recommendation No. 1

The County Executive should recommend legislation to the County Council to formalize the role of the Emergency Management Coordination Committee, defining it as the emergency management coordinating body for King County, led by the Office of Emergency Management, and requiring participation by the emergency manager or designee from each county department and separately-elected office.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**By September 2017**	**OEM/DES/Exec**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 1		
OEM will review best practices on the makeup, mission, and objectives for EMCC as part of the process for EMAP accreditation. The result of the EMAP assessment is expected in Spring 2017. The Executive will then transmit recommended revisions to code.		

Recommendation No. 2

The County Executive should develop and propose to the County Council specific emergency preparedness-related requirements for King County Code and/or Executive Orders for all county departments and separately-elected offices, related to:

a. development of continuity of operations plans
b. annual plan reviews, exercises, and updates
c. designation of a departmental emergency management liaison (with emergency management as an express function in its job description) as the employee responsible for leading compliance with continuity of operations plan requirements and coordination between the department and the Office of Emergency Management and other county functions.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**By September 2017**	**OEM/DES/Exec**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 2		
We agree that preparedness requirements will make us more resilient and responsive. We recommend a comprehensive approach to code changes that is informed by the EMAP process and note that these requirements may have budget implications.		

Recommendation No. 3

As a key player in emergency response, the King County Sheriff's Office should work with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to develop a continuity of operations plan that meets requirements determined by OEM, and provide it to OEM by November 15, 2016.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**November 15, 2016**	**OEM/KCSO**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 3		
While KCSO's current "Critical Incident Management Plan" does an exceptional job of outlining response activities, planning, and responsibilities, its checklists do not meet all of the Continuity of Operations (COOP) standards. OEM and KCSO are working to address these essential elements within the constraints of existing resources.		

Recommendation No. 4

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) should develop and present an annual report to the County Council and County Executive on the status of emergency management in King County prior to budget proposals, including the status of continuity of operations plan development, updates, training, and exercises across all county agencies, and any other elements OEM deems appropriate, especially those that can be quantitatively assessed over time, such as participation in trainings and exercises.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**September 2016, then annually**	**OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
We recommend submittal of this report to the Council in September as noted above.		

Recommendation No. 5

The County Executive should develop, document, and implement a plan to provide the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) with the visibility, leadership, and relationships necessary to effectively and efficiently drive the county's emergency preparedness and response activities. The plan should include implementation timeframes and consideration of making OEM an executive-level department or incorporating it into the Office of the Executive if other strategies do not achieve the desired outcomes.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**Ongoing**	**Exec/DES/OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
The Executive is soliciting input from his Executive Leadership Team and others on best practices concerning the organizational placement of OEM within King County government. As an immediate measure, the Executive designated the OEM Director as a member of the Operations Cabinet. The Operations Cabinet meets monthly and includes representation from separately elected organizations.		

Recommendation No. 6

The County Executive should amend the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan to designate the director of the Office of Emergency Management as the County Emergency Manager and propose related revisions for County Code section 2.56.030 to the County Council.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**September 2017**	**Exec/DES/OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
OEM recommends completion of the EMAP review process to ensure consideration of all best practices and incorporation of all proposed amendments to code in a comprehensive transmittal.		

Recommendation No. 7

The County Executive should require that the designated County Emergency Manager be a certified emergency manager or have comparably significant emergency management experience and sufficient capacity to dedicate a consistent and substantial percentage of work time to emergency management activities.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**N/A**	**OEM/HRD**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
While the Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) credential is highly recommended, it has yet to be established as a baseline requirement for becoming an emergency manager. We agree that obtaining a CEM should be encouraged in the evolving profession of emergency management, but not necessarily required as noted in your recommendation.		

Recommendation No. 8

The Office of Emergency Management and the Human Resources Division of the Department of Executive Services should reclassify Office of Emergency Management employees performing ongoing program functions from term-limited temporary to career service employees.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**January 1, 2017**	**OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
Career service positions supporting ongoing program functions will be requested by OEM as part of the 2017/2018 budget process. OEM will continue to comply with established HR policies for program staffing.		

Recommendation No. 9

The Office of Emergency Management should ensure full Emergency Coordination Center activation on at least an annual basis, whether for natural disaster, planned event, or full scale exercise incorporating key partners.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**For 2016: June 7-10**	**OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
We believe that our current practices fulfill this recommendation. OEM is required by federal regulations to conduct functional exercises and trainings, at least annually, in support of King County and our many partnering agencies. Meeting this standard is essential to our mission. This element also will be reviewed and validated through the EMAP accreditation process we currently are undergoing. Our next functional exercise is the multi-jurisdictional "Cascadia Rising 2016" exercise June 7 -10th including a mock activation of a fully functioning ECC and interaction with hundreds of public and private sector entities.		

Recommendation No. 10

The Office of Emergency Management should continue to develop, document, and proactively implement a plan to develop relationships with leaders and staff in King County departments and divisions that regularly conduct emergency response, specifically, the King County Sheriff's Office, and the Road Services and Water and Land Resources Divisions.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**June 2016**	**OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
OEM will assign liaisons with specific duties related to this recommendation.		

Recommendation No. 11

The Office of Emergency Management should continue its efforts to identify and clearly document the thresholds for emergency coordination center activation and elevation, and communicate them to stakeholders.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**September 2016**	**OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
OEM currently is evaluating our thresholds for activation and elevation and will communicate the result to internal and external stakeholders in advance of the winter weather season. These standards also will be reviewed and revised as part of the EMAP accreditation process.		

Recommendation No. 12

The Office of Emergency Management should build on its initial efforts to clarify its mission, vision, and goals. This process should clearly identify its leadership role in, and goals for:

a. King County government preparedness
b. disaster response in unincorporated King County
c. regional emergency management coordination.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**Underway**	**OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
OEM just completed a professionally-facilitated examination of mission, vision, and strategic goal-setting functions that included input from the entire OEM staff. This work resulted in a proposed Clarity Map (see attached). Creation of a clarity map for each DES Office and Division is a department-wide effort. OEM will now vet the proposed clarity map with both internal and external stakeholders.		

Recommendation No. 13

The Office of Emergency Management should clearly document and communicate its mission and goals to partners and stakeholders within each of the leadership roles in Recommendation 12.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**Underway**	**OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 4		
See Recommendation 12.		

Sheriff Response

Recommendation No. 3

As a key player in emergency response, the King County Sheriff's Office should work with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to develop a continuity of operations plan that meets requirements determined by OEM, and provide it to OEM by November 15, 2016.

Select concurrence below	Implementation date or N/A	Responsible agency
Concur (explanation optional)	**November 15, 2016**	**KCSO/OEM**
Agency concurrence comment, or reason for partial or non-concurrence for Recommendation 3		
Plan to implement as resources allow .		

Statement of Compliance, Scope, Objective & Methodology

Statement of Compliance with Government Auditing Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Audit Scope and Objectives

This audit examines key elements of emergency management in King County. Specifically, we sought to identify the extent to which King County's governance structure for emergency management provides clear roles and responsibilities, sufficient authority, and adequate oversight for coordination and implementation both within King County and across the region. We also identified steps King County has taken to improve emergency management in King County and the region, as well as identified remaining opportunities.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives listed above, the King County Auditor's Office interviewed leadership, management, and staff from the Office of Emergency Management, management from the Department of Executive Services, and key emergency management stakeholders from local and state government and the private sector. We observed several tabletop exercises and Emergency Management Coordination Committee meetings. In addition, we conducted structured interviews with 13 King County department and division directors in order to obtain their views on elements of emergency preparedness and response in King County. We also interviewed emergency management directors from five counties comparable to King County in terms of their population, number of cities and unincorporated areas, number of federally declared disasters, and whether they were in a home rule state:

- San Diego County, Calif.
- Miami Dade County, Fla.
- Montgomery County, Md.
- Multnomah County, Ore.
- Dallas County, Tex.

Most were identified as high-performing by local emergency management professionals, and three are certified by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program. See Appendix 3 for more information.

We reviewed Washington and King County Codes relevant to emergency management, as well as the King County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and Regional Coordination Framework for Disasters and Planned Events. We also reviewed numerous documents from the Office of Emergency Management including after action reports for departmental and countywide training exercises, attendance records for Emergency Management Coordination Committee meetings from 2013 to 2015, and continuity of operations plans.

Statement of Compliance, Scope, Objective & Methodology (cont.)

Scope of Work on Internal Controls

We assessed internal controls relevant to the audit objectives. This included review of selected policies, plans, processes, and reports, as well as interviews with knowledgeable Office of Emergency Management and Department of Executive Services staff. In performing our work, we identified concerns related to operational efficiency and effectiveness of the emergency management structure in King County.

List of Recommendations & Implementation Schedule

Recommendation 1: The County Executive should recommend legislation to the County Council to formalize the role of the Emergency Management Coordination Committee, defining it as the emergency management coordinating body for King County, led by the Office of Emergency Management and requiring participation by the emergency manager or designee from each county department and separately-elected office.

>**Implementation Date:** September 2017
>**Estimate of Impact:** Formalizing the role of the Emergency Management Coordination Committee will strengthen its role as the working body responsible for accomplishing preparedness-related activities across King County departments and separately-elected offices, enhancing King County government's comprehensive disaster response readiness.

Recommendation 2: The County Executive should develop and propose to the County Council specific emergency preparedness-related requirements for King County Code and/or Executive Orders for all county departments and separately-elected offices, related to:

a. development of continuity of operations plans
b. annual plan reviews, exercises, and updates
c. designation of a departmental emergency management liaison (with emergency management as an express function in its job description) as the employee responsible for leading compliance with continuity of operations plan requirements and coordination between the department and the Office of Emergency Management and other county functions.

>**Implementation Date:** September 2017
>**Estimate of Impact:** Identifying specific preparedness-related activities expected of King County departments and separately-elected offices, formalizing them as requirements, and designating individuals responsible for ensuring compliance will provide OEM the authority it needs to effectively drive emergency preparedness across King County government.

Recommendation 3: As a key player in emergency response, the King County Sheriff's Office should work with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to develop a continuity of operations plan that meets requirements determined by OEM, and provide it to OEM by November 15, 2016.

>**Implementation Date:** November 15, 2016
>**Estimate of Impact:** As the primary first responder function within King County government, the King County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) has many critical roles within current county disaster plans. A KCSO continuity of operations plan will both ensure that KCSO is best prepared to continue providing its first responder functions in the case of a disaster and also allow OEM to review current countywide disaster planning assumptions against KCSO's actual resources, improving future planning.

Recommendation 4: The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) should develop and present an annual report to the County Council and County Executive on the status of emergency management in King County prior to budget proposals, including the status of continuity of operations plan development, updates, training, and exercises across all county agencies, and any other elements OEM deems appropriate, especially those that can be quantitatively assessed over time, such as participation in trainings and exercises.

Implementation Date: September 2016, then annually
Estimate of Impact: An annual report will provide transparency and accountability for emergency preparedness efforts to the County Council, County Executive, other county leaders, employees, and the public.

Recommendation 5: The County Executive should develop, document, and implement a plan to provide the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) with the visibility, leadership, and relationships necessary to effectively and efficiently drive the county's emergency preparedness and response activities. The plan should include implementation timeframes and consideration of making OEM an executive-level department or incorporating it into the Office of the Executive if other strategies do not achieve the desired outcomes.

Implementation Date: Ongoing
Estimate of Impact: Best-performing emergency management offices are able to leverage their organizational placement and relationships to motivate ongoing emergency preparedness activities throughout their organization. Raising the profile of OEM and its preparedness-related activities and requirements will help ensure that King County consistently engages in these activities, resulting in better emergency preparedness.

Recommendation 6: The County Executive should amend the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan to designate the director of the Office of Emergency Management as the County Emergency Manager and propose related revisions for County Code section 2.56.030 to the County Council.

Implementation Date: September 2017
Estimate of Impact: In high-performing emergency management jurisdictions, the emergency manager works directly with the chief executive to carry out the jurisdiction's emergency response activities. High-performing emergency management functions, therefore, have the designated emergency manager lead their emergency management function. Designating the OEM director as county emergency manager will help ensure subject-matter expertise and functional knowledge of county plans and capabilities during disasters.

Recommendation 7: The County Executive should require that the designated County Emergency Manager be a certified emergency manager or have comparably significant emergency management experience and sufficient capacity to dedicate a consistent and substantial percentage of work time to emergency management activities.

> **Implementation Date:** N/A
> **Estimate of Impact:** High-performing emergency management functions have an individual with subject-matter expertise and primary focus on emergency management activities in the emergency manager role. Designating the county emergency manager as someone with such expertise and capacity will provide professional level expertise in preparing and responding to disasters.

Recommendation 8: The Office of Emergency Management and the Human Resources Division of the Department of Executive Services should reclassify Office of Emergency Management employees performing ongoing program functions from term-limited temporary to career service employees.

> **Implementation Date:** January 1, 2017
> **Estimate of Impact:** Key emergency management positions are currently filled by temporary employees. Changing these positions to permanent will have a positive effect on staff continuity and morale, preserving expertise within OEM.

Recommendation 9: The Office of Emergency Management should ensure full Emergency Coordination Center activation on at least an annual basis, whether for natural disaster, planned event, or full scale exercise incorporating key partners.

> **Implementation Date:** For 2016: June 7-10
> **Estimate of Impact:** There are multiple levels of activation for the Emergency Coordination Center; designated personnel respond to the center based on the specific disaster response. Full activation of the Emergency Coordination Center will build relationships necessary in disasters and help maintain skills for those less familiar with activation and individuals in new positions.

Recommendation 10: The Office of Emergency Management should continue to develop, document, and proactively implement a plan to develop relationships with leaders and staff in King County departments and divisions that regularly conduct emergency response, specifically, the King County Sheriff's Office, and the Road Services and Water and Land Resources Divisions.

> **Implementation Date:** June 2016
> **Estimate of Impact:** The King County Sheriff's Office and Road Services and Water and Land Resources Divisions are direct responders to regional emergencies. Greater familiarity and

regular coordination and training with these offices and divisions will help improve disaster response and coordination among them and OEM in major disasters.

Recommendation 11: The Office of Emergency Management should continue its efforts to identify and clearly document the thresholds for emergency coordination center activation and elevation, and communicate them to stakeholders.

> **Implementation Date:** September 2016
> **Estimate of Impact:** Identifying the thresholds for providing assistance and coordination among these groups in local and regional disasters will help improve preparedness across the region.

Recommendation 12: The Office of Emergency Management should build on its initial efforts to clarify its mission, vision, and goals. This process should clearly identify its leadership role in, and goals for:
 a. King County government preparedness
 b. disaster response in unincorporated King County
 c. regional emergency management coordination.

> **Implementation Date:** Underway
> **Estimate of Impact:** King County has a challenging role in emergency management, acting as regional emergency management preparedness coordinator, preparing King County government for disasters, and leading disaster response operations in rural communities. By clarifying its mission and goals for each of these areas, it will be better able to balance the demands among them given OEM's limited resources. Further, clarifying expectations among stakeholders will enhance OEM's credibility.

Recommendation 13: The Office of Emergency Management should clearly document and communicate its mission and goals to partners and stakeholders within each of the leadership roles in Recommendation 12.

> **Implementation Date:** Underway
> **Estimate of Impact:** Sharing OEM's mission and goals with partners, both regional and internal to King County, will facilitate relationship-building and collaboration between OEM and its partners.