

THE PIPELINE

News from the Ventura County Public Works Agency

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From the Director's Desk

Jeff Pratt,
Public Works
Agency Director



Dear Friends,

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to a dear friend and colleague. Adan Lara was a devoted part of our Ventura County Public Works Agency team and will be greatly missed. In this issue of *The Pipeline*, we honor him and carry on our mission to deliver efficient, responsive, and cost-effective public works services that protect and enhance the safety, health, and quality of life in Ventura County.

Within that mission, one of the critical tasks is to prepare for both extremes when it comes to our weather — severe drought and severe flooding. We have experienced the former for several years now, and past newsletter issues have focused on water conservation. But with the warnings of El Niño, we could soon be looking at the latter, and it's critical that we have the infrastructure and training to handle it. On September 29-30 we conducted our annual disaster response drill, Storm Day. Read on to find out what that involved, how it was implemented, and why we consider it a priority.

All the Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Pratt".

Jeff Pratt
Director



Adan Lara

In Memoriam

Community minded

Citizen of the Year in Ojai

Civic Minded

Worked with us at VCPWA for 11 years.

**Adan Lara – Your friends and
colleagues of The Ventura County
Public Works Agency will**

**Always
Remember you.**



On October 30, 2015, Ventura County Public Works Agency Transportation Department employee Adan Lara was struck by a car while flagging traffic on Creek Road near Ojai, and died from his injuries.

For those of you who didn't have a chance to meet Adan, he was one of a kind. Liked and respected by his co-workers, Adan was a person who genuinely took great pride in his work and thoroughly enjoyed his job. Adan was also very active in his community and in his church. He volunteered to teach classes at Nordhoff High School, helped to register voters, and worked polling places during elections.

Adan was born in Colima, Mexico, and was a lifelong resident of Ojai, where in 1999 he was awarded the Citizen of the Year award for his extensive community service and volunteer work by the Ojai Valley Chamber of Commerce. Adan was president of the Ojai Valley Mexican Fiesta, founded L.U.P.E. – Latinos Unidos Por Educacion – and created the "Amigos" reading program at the Ojai Library. He was also a loved and respect family man who leaves behind a wife, son, and two daughters. Adan had a great sense of humor and was always cheerful, always smiling. We at Public Works will miss him greatly.

Your safety and that of the public are our top priority. This tragic event is a sobering reminder that we must be vigilant about safety procedures and equipment on a daily basis in the hazardous work that we do.





STORM DAY 2015

With California in the midst of one of the most extreme droughts in history and water conservation efforts in full force across Ventura County, reports of an impending El Niño may seem like news worth celebrating. Experts are predicting that the upcoming winter could be one of the wettest in history, and while Ventura County could certainly benefit from the moisture, this storm potential has led VCPWA and other agencies to focus not just on water conservation, but also on how to effectively manage the potential consequences of excessive rain.

Prolonged dry periods followed by months of considerable rainfall generally lead to flooding, heavy debris flow, and mudslides. In some circumstances, these incidents have the ability to threaten the viability of roads, drains, culverts, and other vital infrastructures. It's up to government agencies and officials to prepare, and to protect their communities from the dangers presented by prolonged storms such as El Niño.

Ventura County Public Works Agency is ready...

On September 29th and 30th, VCPWA conducted its annual Storm Day disaster response drill. Led by Karl Novak, Deputy Director of the Watershed Protection District, the exercise was designed to underscore VCPWA's role as first responders in floods, fires, earthquakes, or other emergency circumstances. In critical situations, VCPWA works alongside the Ventura County Sheriff's Department, the Ventura County Fire Department, and emergency medical personnel to sustain critical infrastructure and maintain public safety. Joining the drill for 2015 was the Ventura County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services led by Gil Zavlodaver. "It is vital that our two agencies plan, train, and prepare together for major storm events," said Zavlodaver. "Storm Day is a great opportunity for us to practice working on our response to winter storm incidents."

The drill began with an 8am "storm forecast broadcast" and activation of the Emergency

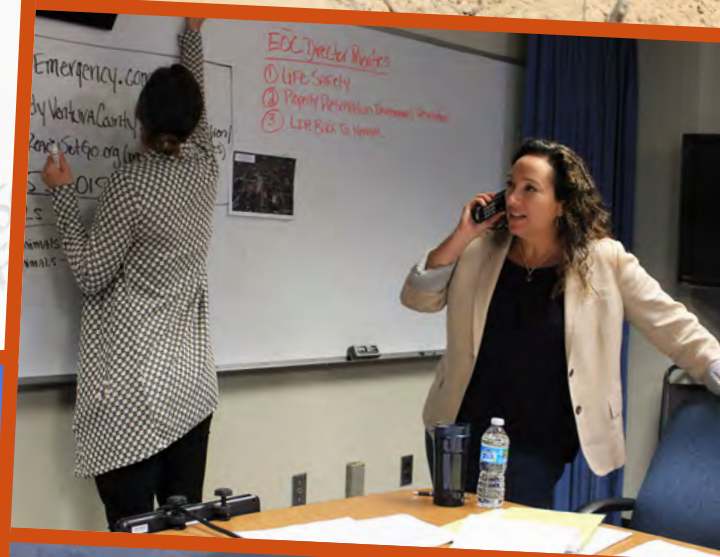
Operations Center (EOC) on the morning of September 29th, and personnel were assigned to their Storm Day duty stations. Pre-loaded injects designed by VCPWA and Sheriff Department staff were initiated shortly after the broadcast.

On Wednesday September 30th, VCPWA personnel reported to their Storm Day duty stations. Throughout the exercise, agency staff worked entirely from the work stations they would occupy in the event of a real storm emergency. Many began field exercises and storm patrols as early as 6:30am. As staff encountered scenarios or were diverted to incidents in the field, they reported them to the Department Operations Centers through the new Public Works Agency mobile emergency tracking system and communications management tool. "This new emergency tracking system is a communications upgrade and will help us efficiently direct our field teams in the event of El Niño flooding," said Novak.

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Storm Day is an annual event, but this year's exercise included a major incident simulation site on Center School Road in Somis. VCPWA deployed a 60-foot long-reach excavator, loader, dump truck, and light plant in response to reports of a blocked culvert. In the event of a real storm, such a blockage could cause severe flooding and potentially threaten nearby homes and schools, so a crew of 10, led by VCPWA Watershed Protection District Superintendent Roger Boross, worked for several hours to remove actual debris from the area. Not only did the incident simulation help prepare staff for an emergency response, but it also prepped the culvert for the real rain that's on its way.

In addition to field crews reporting and addressing incidents throughout the County, VCPWA staffed its Agency Operations Center and Departmental Operations Centers to test and improve command and control of resources and communications at all levels. Also, administration teams tested the County's procedure for declaring County and state emergencies, as well as state and federal data collection methods for disaster-related expense reimbursement. Local public information officers also participated in the exercise from the Joint Information Command center located at the Ventura County Government Center. PIOs tested processes for collecting, verifying, and distributing information to spokespeople as it came in from VCPWA representatives in the field.



Q&A with Karl Novak

Q: Storm Day is such a fascinating inside look at how VCPWA operates. Can you describe the preparation/planning process for Storm Day 2015?

A: It takes about three months to get ready for an Agency-wide exercise. We convened a team with members of each VCPWA department, as well as Sheriff, CEO, and RMA staff. We work with each group to create storm scenarios that will test their departments' field and communication capabilities. We try to be creative, but not too crazy, with the scenarios so that realistic responses are required for realistic emergency situations.

Q: Can you describe the role of VCPWA as first responders in a real emergency/disaster situation?

A: VCPWA staff go into patrol mode during a storm or earthquake. They look for damage to our facilities, blocked roads, and flooding. We are often the first to discover a problem and will respond immediately to fix the problem. Our staff are fully equipped and respond to emergencies, day or night.

Q: Why is training PIOs and other personnel important for an emergency/disaster situation?

A: The public relies on VCPWA to give them clear roads, clean water, and homes that are safe from flooding. Severe storms and earthquakes can instantly damage the public works infrastructure that provides these safeguards. Our staff must quickly respond and repair our infrastructure when it is damaged, especially in an emergency. Emergency training in flood-fighting methods, emergency communications, around-the-clock mobilization and repairs is provided to our staff to familiarize them with emergency plans and procedures and prepare them to respond effectively when necessary.

Q: How will VCPWA work with the OES in the event of a real disaster/emergency?

A: VCPWA will be represented by a Public Works Agency Department Director in the Emergency Operations Center during an event. We will forward and interpret weather forecasts, stream flow levels, road closures, facility damage information, and deployment of VCPWA resources to the OES staff in support of emergency operations. We will also request state and federal resources, if needed, through the EOC.

Q: We're in this historic drought right now. What do you say to those not concerned about storm/emergency preparedness?

A: Although most of our calls from the public reflect a deep concern about El Niño, I've had a few calls asking why we are doing any work in the dry channels. It can be hard to imagine our currently empty river beds flowing full and spilling over their banks, but you only have to remember back to 2005 to know it has happened and may occur again this winter.

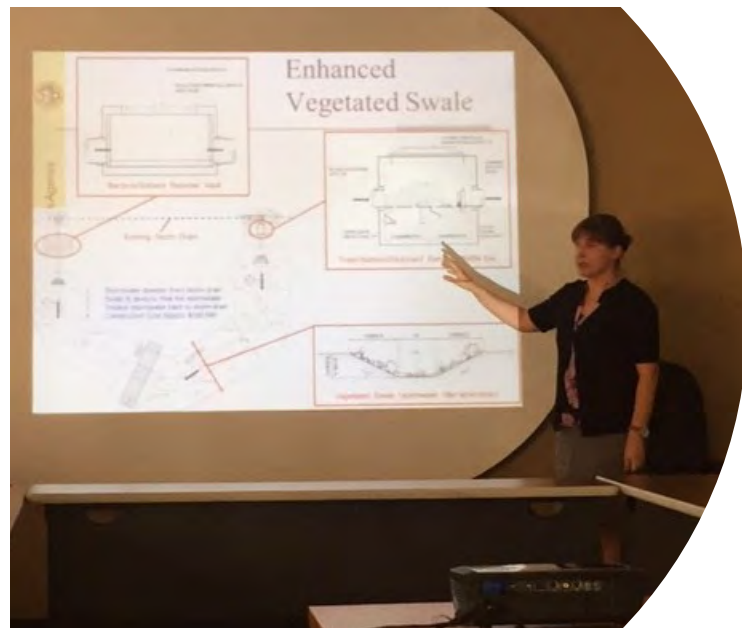
Q: What does the agency hope to learn from the Storm Day "incident" in Somis?

A: We set up flood-fighting exercises to test our staff at field locations throughout the County. This allows our staff to practice all of the same response activities they will need to make during an actual storm, including discovery and communication of the problem and diverting and mobilizing staff, vehicles, and equipment to the location. During a real storm, it might be 2am and pouring rain. There may be challenges with access points, lighting, and communication procedures. So the more practice staff have with tricky field operations such as the one in Somis, the better.



VCPWA Speaking Engagement

On August 20, VCPWA Stormwater Program Manager Ewelina Mutkowska gave an in-depth presentation to the members of the Ventura Chamber Green Task Force about her management in implementing the Ventura Municipal Stormwater Permit for the County's unincorporated areas and the County Stormwater Program. The meeting held a lively discussion about the County's stormwater treatment efforts, which included the completed Green Streets retrofit project at the County Government Center as well as two on-going projects in Meiners Oaks and El Rio.



Storm Day presented an opportunity for the public to be made aware of VCPWA's storm preparation efforts, and media from both the Ventura and Los Angeles areas were on-site in Somis and at the AOC, JIC, and OES to capture the action. Many VCPWA staff and management team members were featured on the 5pm NBC and KEYT news broadcasts and in the October 1st edition of the *Ventura County Star*.

A big thank you to Ewelina Mutkowska and Alison Sweet, who spent Storm Day as acting public information officers for VCPWA. Their participation helped ensure the effective flow of verified storm updates from the field and command centers to the public through the joint information command center. Great work!



Check out the links below to see the exciting coverage!
www.keyt.com/news/Ventura-County-Prepares-for-El-Nino/35587568

www.vcstar.com/news/local-news/drill-helps-ventura-county-crews-prepare-for-possible-punishing-el-nio-storms_96100198