

Member, Board of Supervisors
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

AARON PESKIN

September 12, 2017

Barbara Garcia
Director
San Francisco Department of Public Health
101 Grove Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Director Garcia:

Supervisors Peskin and Kim have called for a hearing on San Francisco's coordinated preparation and response to the record-breaking September 1 - 3, 2017 heat wave (File no. 170962), and ask that the Department of Public Health present at the Government Audit and Oversight committee hearing scheduled for September 20. Please be advised of the following questions:

- The National Weather Service predicted that San Francisco would be experiencing "severe" levels of heat as of August 29. What steps did DPH take to plan for this extreme weather? What is the temperature threshold for the City to have cause for concern and take emergency action based on a warning like this? (Does the City and the National Weather Service similarly define "severe"?) What are the criteria to warrant an emergency plan?
- Which City department takes the lead in developing an emergency plan and what is the role that DPH plays? Does this vary given the nature of the emergency (weather, earthquake, terrorism)?
- On DPH's website, it states: "In 2010, the San Francisco Department of Public Health was awarded funding from the CDC to participate in the Climate-Ready States and Cities Initiative. The goal of the program is to help states and cities develop ways to anticipate health effects of climate change by applying climate science, predicting health impacts, and preparing flexible programs. The focus of our work for this initiative has been preventing heat stress morbidity and mortality from extreme heat events and associated air quality impacts, which are expected to increase in frequency and duration with climate change. For more information on our Climate and Health program, visit the Program on Health, Equity and Sustainability website." Unfortunately, the links do not work. What is the update on this plan and funding, and the reporting that was likely required for this grant? How was the plan used during the recent heat wave?

- As part of the outcome of the CDC grant, which has been renewed for another 3 years, DPH was to engage in “Disaster Planning, in collaboration with San Francisco Department of Emergency Management Services (SFDEM) [and] convened and co-chaired an inter-agency task force to conduct strategic planning that developed a City and County of San Francisco heat wave disaster response plan, appropriate surveillance and health education/outreach activities to protect San Franciscans.” Unfortunately this link also doesn’t work. Has there been a “Heat Wave Disaster Response Plan” developed?
- Also, on DPH’s website, it states: “San Francisco showed specific vulnerabilities during the 2006 California heat wave, due to our lack of physiologic and technologic adaptations for extreme heat events. For this reason, the SFDPH Environmental Health Section developed the Heat Vulnerability Index, which geographically predicts high risk areas during an extreme heat event . . .” How have lessons learned from the 2006 heat wave affected City response to subsequent heat waves, including our most recent one?
- Given that DPH has produced a map to chart heat vulnerability index by Census block group, how is this information used and shared with other City departments? Particularly, how is the Disaster Planning coordinated with the Department of Emergency Management Services?
- What is the standard procedure for noticing public safety information for the general public? What is the standard procedure for translating safety information? Which City department is responsible for this? Why did it take until mid-day Saturday for the existing hours of operation of our libraries and pools to be disseminated to the Board of Supervisors? And why wasn’t Tagalog included?
- How does DPH use the press to disseminate vital information? What was the press plan to get out cooling station information on radio and TV, including ethnic media, in advance of the heat wave? What about public service announcements on our SFMTA vehicles? What about using the noon citywide emergency system loudspeaker alert? When is this system used? Were any of these options considered to notify constituents of the dangers of the heat wave and potential reprieves? Are there protocols about how and when to use media methods for information dissemination?
- Why weren’t there cooling stations set up prior to the heat wave? And, why weren’t there extended hours of our air-conditioned public buildings, like libraries?
- Given the fact that the Medical Examiner reports that the 3 people who died during the heat wave lived alone, died at home and none of them had called for medical help, how does DPH use its Vulnerability Index to work with other departments to do outreach to our most vulnerable residents? Is there a plan to reach particular vulnerable populations (because of disabilities, age, language, or isolation)? Are there “emergency information trees” that connect City departments to nonprofits that serve our most vulnerable residents?

- What kind of feedback loop and reflection is there after a disaster happens? How does DPH (with other City departments) assess response and coordination so as to improve on it next time? Is there a performance matrix that is used to measure response?

Thank you for your response to these inquiries. I respectfully request to have DPH's response submitted to the Clerk, as well as members of the GAO committee, by Tuesday morning, September 19. I look forward to the September 20 hearing. If you have any questions, please contact my office and my legislative aide, Beth Rubenstein at 415-554-7453 or beth.rubenstein@sfgov.org



Aaron Peskin