

2008-2009 SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY GRAND JURY

AD HOC COMMITTEE

REPORT ON THE WEST VALLEY DETENTION CENTER POWER FAILURE

BACKGROUND

The West Valley Detention Center (WVDC) was built in 1991 and has been occupied for approximately 18 years. On September 14, 2008, the Grand Jury attended a scheduled meeting at the WVDC. During this meeting the Grand Jury was informed that the WVDC suffered a major power outage on August 28, 2008, the Friday before the Labor Day holiday.

Electric service from Southern California Edison (SCE) was interrupted from 10:00 PM to midnight on August 28. According to the Sheriff's Department, power was restored at approximately midnight August 29, 2008, but again failed for a longer duration at 6:00 AM. The two power interruptions totaled 36 hours. During this electrical outage employees of the Sheriff's Department and other San Bernardino County personnel attempted to put WVDC's electrical system back to working order.

As a result of the power interruption from SCE, three of the seven county-owned step-down transformers were rendered inoperable. Due to the failure of the three transformers, the on-site electrical generation system failed as it attempted to start. In order to restore minimum electrical service to WVDC, the County rented two large electrical generators and a larger number of smaller generators were rented or purchased to provide lights and power for essential services. Full power to WVDC was resumed in three weeks.

San Bernardino County Facilities Management was responsible for providing the interface electrical equipment and connection between SCE and WVDC. During an October 23, 2008 meeting attended by Grand Jurors, Facilities Management personnel reported that one of the step-down transformers had failed due to an oil leak. Also, other indicators of neglect and poor maintenance were noted during the discussion. When asked if the emergency power back-up system had ever been tested, Facilities Management personnel responded that the system had been tested once but that test had failed. The County required the use of an outside electrical contractor, and their use of a single-line diagram, to analyze the power outage problem leading to the eventual restoration of electrical service to WVDC.

FINDINGS

1. Facilities Management has the responsibility for maintaining the emergency power facility at WVDC, and their staff electricians and personnel lack cohesive direction and expertise in the operation and maintenance of WVDC's emergency power system.
2. Emergency power back-up generators at WVDC are not routinely tested.
3. There is no manufacturer service or certification program for several pieces of critical electrical equipment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The County of San Bernardino shifts the responsibility for the emergency electrical system at WVDC from Facilities Management to the Sheriff's Department. (See finding #1)
2. The County creates a Plant Manager position at WVDC for the purpose of overseeing all electrical maintenance and testing at the facility. (See finding #1)
3. The County begins a systematic process for testing the electrical equipment at the WVDC emergency power plant. (See finding #2)
4. The County institutes a servicing and certification program for the following electrical equipment at WVDC:
 - a. Switch gear at all electrical locations.
 - b. Electrical control equipment.
 - c. Emergency generators.
 - d. Transformers.
 - e. Any other equipment required to maintain emergency back-up power to WVDC. (See finding #3)