

California Office of Homeland Security Public Officials Initiative

Overview:

Office of Homeland Security (OHS), in partnership with the University of California, has developed and is responsible for conducting a series of seminars for public officials to better prepare elected and appointed public officials for their pivotal role in managing public messaging and restoring confidence in government following a catastrophic terrorist event or natural disaster.

The program provides training for public officials on:

- Elected officials' roles and responsibilities.
- Lessons learned from previous disasters.
- Crisis communications during an incident of national significance.

Seminars are available to city council members, mayors, board of supervisors, police and fire chiefs, public health officers, and their senior staffs. Seminars are conducted in conjunction with the Governor's Annual Statewide Exercise Series, "Golden Guardian."

Accomplishments:

- Since creation of the program in 2007, five seminars have been conducted; one in Orange County, two in Santa Clara County, and one in San Joaquin County.
- Public officials that have participated represent over 3 million Californians.

Future Plans:

- In 2008, OHS plans to introduce an interactive online curriculum, for all current and newly elected public officials.
- In 2008 the plans are to continue to include the Public Officials Initiative Seminars as part of the building block process to prepare all officials in the State of California under the umbrella of the Golden Guardian program.

City Clerks

As Clerks are public officials (elected or appointed) this training applies to us; and as many City Council members may be unsure of their roles during a disaster this would be a great chance to evaluate the program for bringing to your City Council to help them be prepared.

City Clerk Suzie Alessi and Experiences from the South Lake Tahoe Fire

In June 2007 South Lake Tahoe suffered from a wildfire which destroyed 254 homes, displaced 1000 people, charred over 3100 acres of forest land and burned for over a week. City Clerk Suzie Alessi will share her personal experiences and multiple roles she assumed with opening and operating the EOC, issues working with multiple agencies, elected officials, the clerk's role in communications and other lessons learned.

Suzie says that she was called upon to be the PIO and credits information she received from an NCCCA session "Working with the Media" provided by PIO John Pilger of Sunnyvale just a few months prior to the crisis.