



# EAST PALO ALTO STUDY SESSION 7-28-25

## Seismic and Soil-Related Hazards



### Description of Issue

East Palo Alto is located in a region with a high risk of earthquakes. The city is near several active faults, including the San Andreas, Hayward, San Gregorio, and San Jose faults, which could all cause strong ground shaking. While no faults run directly through the city, a major earthquake on these or other faults could still cause severe shaking throughout East Palo Alto, potentially damaging buildings and infrastructure and triggering secondary hazards.

Liquefaction occurs when saturated soils temporarily lose strength during an earthquake. It is a major concern in East Palo Alto, since much of the city is built on loose or artificial fill near the Bay and San Francisquito Creek, making buildings in these areas particularly vulnerable. These areas are also at risk from uneven ground sinking. Older structures built before modern seismic codes may be at greater risk.

Other seismic-related hazards like tsunamis, seiche (bay water sloshing due to earthquakes), and dam failure present localized risks, especially along Ravenswood Slough and the San Francisquito Creek corridor.

Climate change is expected to increase these risks by raising groundwater levels and sea levels. This is likely to increase the extent and severity of liquefaction, uneven ground sinking, tsunami flooding, and levee failure.

### Summary of Current City Policies

- Applying current development and construction standards, including State seismic safety guidance, to reduce risks from earthquakes and geologic hazards.
- Requiring licensed engineering geologists to evaluate development proposals in unstable or hazardous soil conditions and incorporating their recommendations into project designs.
- Mandating site-specific geotechnical investigations for new construction and major improvements in liquefaction and tsunami hazard zones.
- Assessing the need for seismic upgrades to public facilities and older and soft-story multi-family housing.

### Draft Policy Approaches

**Construction Requirements.** Apply the proper development engineering and building construction requirements and best practices to avoid or minimize risks from seismic and geologic hazards.

**Robust Seismic Guidance.** Enforce the most recent State guidance for seismic and geologic hazards when evaluating development proposals.

**Licensed Geologist.** Require that a state licensed engineering geologist prepare and/or review development proposals involving grading, unstable soils, and other hazardous conditions. Incorporate recommendations of the geologist into design plans, potentially including building modifications and open space easements.

**Seismic Upgrades.** Examine necessity of seismic upgrades to existing public facilities, existing multi-family housing constructed prior to 1971, and existing soft-story multi-family housing.

**Site-Specific Geotechnical Investigations.** Require individual site-specific geotechnical investigations for new construction and substantial improvements projects within liquefaction hazard zones and tsunami-prone areas, as shown on Figures 10-2 and 10-3, to determine the depth of bedrock, soil stability, location of rift zones, and other localized geotechnical problems as part of the environmental and/or development review process for all structures.

### Do You Have Any Suggestions?



# Flooding



## Description of Issue

Flooding is a longstanding and serious issue in East Palo Alto, made worse by the city's low elevation and proximity to the San Francisco Bay and San Francisquito Creek. Residents face flooding from poor drainage, creek overflows, very high tides or storm surges, flash floods from intense rainfall, and potential flooding from dam failure. These events can damage homes and property, threaten public safety, and disrupt daily life.

The City has experienced multiple major floods in recent decades, most notably in 1998, 2012, and 2022, causing property and infrastructure damage and forcing evacuations. The Woodland, University Village, and Ravenswood neighborhoods are particularly vulnerable. Over half of East Palo Alto lies within a FEMA-designated floodplain, and roughly half of properties face heightened flood risk. Many streets still lack storm drains, and existing infrastructure, such as the O'Connor Pump Station, struggles to handle even moderate storm events.

Flood risks are made worse by aging infrastructure, the potential for levee overtopping or failure, and future climate change impacts. Sea level rise and increased groundwater levels are expected to expand flood zones and increase the severity of flood events. Climate change is also driving more frequent and intense rainfall, which will overwhelm stormwater systems. Flooding combined with other hazards, such as seismic activity or exposure of hazardous materials creates further risks.

The City is actively working to reduce these risks through local ordinances, regional partnerships, and participation in FEMA's Community Rating System. However, flooding remains a top safety concern for East Palo Alto's residents.

## Summary of Current City Policies

- Participating in FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program and Community Rating System (CRS) to reduce flood insurance costs by implementing enhanced floodplain management, education, and mitigation activities.
- Restricting development in flood-prone areas and requiring projects in floodplains to provide replacement flood storage and meet updated FEMA and climate-resilient standards.
- Upgrading the City's storm drain system through the Storm Drain Master Plan, including pipe improvements, pump station retrofits, green infrastructure, and regular maintenance to address drainage issues.
- Enhancing flood resilience of public infrastructure and essential services by avoiding high-risk locations when possible and incorporating flood protection measures into public buildings and utilities.
- Supporting residents and businesses, especially those in historically impacted areas, through flood retrofit assistance, emergency planning, recovery programs, and community co-created flood response plans.

## Draft Policy Approaches

**Flood Insurance Program.** Continue to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program and FEMA's voluntary programs, such as the Community Rating System.

**Community Rating System Improvement.** Identify and implement programs and projects that improve the City's Community Rating System (CRS) rating to reduce flood insurance premiums for residents, including enhanced floodplain management activities, public information programs, and flood mitigation projects.

**Development in floodways.** Continue to minimize or restrict development in the floodway and floodway fringe.

**Public buildings.** Enhance flood protection for essential public buildings and associated parking areas.

**Safeguarding Underground Utilities in Flood-Prone Areas.** Coordinate with utility providers to protect or relocate underground utility infrastructure that is located in areas prone to flooding.

**Home Hardening Against Flooding.** Partner with Community-Based Organizations to provide educational resources and support for grants or other funds that could provide financial assistance to low-resourced households

and rental properties located in flood hazard zones to harden homes against flooding.

**Drainage and Flood Control Systems.** Design and implement integrated stormwater management systems that combine traditional drainage

**Drainage Improvements.** Regularly remove debris and increase the amount of landscaped areas and other permeable surfaces in public and private projects to improve drainage, especially in flood-prone areas adjacent to San Francisquito Creek and the San Francisco Bay.

**Flooding Preparation and Response.** Co-create flooding preparation and response action plans with community members to complement technical expertise with local knowledge.

**Flood Impact Assistance.** Develop programs to assist residents and businesses with flood preparation and recovery, with particular focus on historically impacted areas such as the O'Keefe area and areas near San Francisquito Creek. This includes emergency planning support, post-flood cleanup assistance, and coordination with recovery resources.

## Do You Have Any Suggestions?



EAST PALO ALTO STUDY SESSION 7-28-25

# Sea Level Rise and Emergent Groundwater



## Description of the Issue

Rising global temperatures are causing sea levels to rise. In East Palo Alto, this already results in more frequent flooding during storms and high tides, particularly in low-lying neighborhoods near the Bay and along San Francisquito Creek. In future years, large sections of East Palo Alto may be permanently underwater from rising seas, including critical community facilities, schools, and neighborhoods. Many local residents, including low-income households, older adults, immigrants, or residents dependent on medication or medical devices, are likely to be disproportionately harmed.

Sea level rise creates an additional hazard known as emergent groundwater. As sea levels rise, saltwater pushes inland beneath the ground, forcing freshwater upwards and causing flooding from below the surface. This emergent groundwater threatens to flood basements, destabilize foundations, corrode underground infrastructure, and spread contamination from hazardous sites. Unlike surface flooding, emergent groundwater cannot be stopped by levees or seawalls, making it a unique challenge requiring innovative solutions to protect public health and maintain stormwater system effectiveness. OneShoreline, also known as the San Mateo County Flood and Sea Level Rise Resiliency District, leads collaborative, multi-jurisdictional efforts to plan and implement long-term infrastructure projects that reduce flood risk, adapt to sea level rise, and protect shoreline communities and ecosystems.

## Summary of Current City Policies

### Sea Level Rise

- Implement flood control and mitigation requirements for properties vulnerable to sea level rise, update floodplain regulations to incorporate the latest sea level rise projections, and integrate these considerations into capital planning and infrastructure siting to enhance long-term resilience.
- Collaborate regionally with OneShoreline and neighboring jurisdictions to assess vulnerability, develop shoreline adaptation plans, prioritize equitable investments, and protect residents from displacement through tenant protections and relocation assistance.

### Emergent Groundwater

- Integrate emergent groundwater considerations into Capital Improvement Project planning and require geotechnical investigations for new development and substantial improvements in vulnerable areas to assess and mitigate risks such as buoyancy, seepage, liquefaction, corrosion, and contaminant mobilization.
- Coordinate regionally with OneShoreline and adjacent jurisdictions to better understand shallow groundwater rise impacts on people, infrastructure, and ecosystems, and incorporate coordinated adaptation strategies into local planning documents and codes.

## Draft Policy Approaches

### Sea Level Rise

**Resilient Siting and Design for Critical Facilities.** Site new critical facilities and public infrastructure in areas that are not vulnerable to sea level rise hazards. If new critical facilities and public infrastructure cannot be located outside of areas prone to sea level rise, ensure that facilities are constructed to appropriate standards to maintain operations under these future conditions over the life of the project.

### Subregional Shoreline Adaptation Plan Development.

In coordination with OneShoreline and consistent with Bay Conservation and Development Commission guidelines, prepare a Subregional Shoreline Adaptation Plan that identifies nature-based solutions, infrastructure improvements, and policy strategies to address sea level rise impacts.

**Private Building Sea Level Rise Protection.** Require new private development in areas vulnerable to sea level rise to elevate habitable areas above projected sea level rise elevations based on medium-high risk scenarios through 2100, or implement alternative flood-resistant design measures.

### Existing Private Building Adaptation Assistance.

Support property owners in sea level rise vulnerable areas by facilitating access to technical and financial assistance programs for retrofitting existing buildings with flood-resistant measures, prioritizing low-income households and communities of concern.

**Equitable Sea Level Rise Adaptation.** Prioritize sea level rise adaptation investments and resiliency programs in historically disadvantaged communities and areas with high concentrations of vulnerable populations, including renters, low-income households, and communities of color.

**Anti-Displacement Protections.** Develop policies and programs to prevent displacement of residents in medium-high sea level rise scenarios by 2100 due to sea level rise impacts, including tenant protections, relocation assistance, and affordable housing preservation in safer areas.

### Emergent Groundwater

**Emergent Groundwater in Capital Planning.** Integrate emergent groundwater from sea level rise into the planning of Capital Improvement Projects.

**Development Requirements in Emergent Groundwater Areas.** Encourage construction and substantial improvements in areas at risk of emergent groundwater to conduct geotechnical investigations that assess vulnerability to shallow groundwater rise and incorporate project measures to monitor and reduce impacts from buoyancy, seepage, infiltration, liquefaction, corrosion, and contaminant mobilization hazards.

**Regional Groundwater Rise Planning.** Coordinate with OneShoreline and adjacent jurisdictions to establish detailed understanding of shallow groundwater rise effects on people, ecological assets, and the built environment. Incorporate regionally coordinated adaptation strategies for emergent groundwater into the City's General Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, and Municipal Code.

**Geotechnical Assessment and Mitigation for Emergent Groundwater Areas.** Require new development or redevelopment in emergent groundwater areas to assess the vulnerability to shallow groundwater rise through a geotechnical investigation and incorporate project measures to monitor and reduce seasonal and permanent impacts, including buoyancy, seepage, infiltration, liquefaction, corrosion, and contaminant mobilization hazards.

## Do You Have Any Suggestions?



EAST PALO ALTO STUDY SESSION 7-28-25

# Fire, Air Quality, and Public Health



## Description of Issue

East Palo Alto faces significant public health risks from worsening air quality, wildfire smoke, and vector-borne diseases. These hazardous conditions are made worse by climate change and existing disparities in healthcare access. The city experiences some of the highest air pollution levels in San Mateo County, with asthma-related emergency visits for children nearly double the county rate. Frontline communities, such as those adjacent to industry or polluting facilities, are especially vulnerable to poor air quality and wildfire smoke from regional fires, which can trigger severe respiratory and cardiovascular effects. Disease-carrying pests like mosquitoes and ticks are expected to thrive under future warmer conditions. As extreme heat, wildfires, and disease outbreaks become more frequent, East Palo Alto will require proactive public health strategies, regional coordination, and investments in healthcare infrastructure to protect vulnerable populations.

## Summary of Current City Policies

### Fire

- Supporting the Menlo Park Fire Protection District in maintaining strong emergency response times, fire service capabilities, public education, and training programs.
- Coordinating with regional partners to reduce fire risks through fuel management, fire-safe infrastructure, and reliable water supply for firefighting.

### Air Quality and Public Health

- Protecting public health and air quality by requiring new development to follow BAAQMD standards, promoting enhanced building ventilation, and integrating air quality into capital project planning, with a focus on vulnerable populations.
- Supporting community health through regional coordination, expanded access to clean air spaces and filtration programs, equitable healthcare partnerships, and proactive planning for vector-borne disease and environmental hazards.

## Draft Policy Approaches

### Fire

**Fuel reduction strategies.** Continue to coordinate with the Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District, Caltrans, the cities of Menlo Park and Palo Alto, and other bayfront property owners to implement fuel reduction and weed abatement in areas of highest risk.

**Fire resilient critical services and facilities.**

Ensure that facilities are constructed to appropriate standards to maintain operations during and after disaster events.

**Fire Service Capabilities.** Support the Menlo Park Fire Protection District in maintaining and enhancing fire service capabilities through proactive maintenance of fire equipment and training of fire personnel.

**Emergency Services Training.** Support programs for ongoing staff training focused on understanding risks posed by older structures and infrastructure, as well as risk reduction activities.

**Adequate Water Supply.** Maintain and enhance water supply infrastructure to ensure adequate supplies for existing and future daily demands and firefighting suppression requirements.

### Air Quality and Public Health

**Regional Collaboration for Air Quality**

**Management.** Continue to collaborate with Bay Area Air Quality Management District and surrounding jurisdictions to address regional air quality impacts and implement coordinated response strategies.

**Building Standards to Safeguard Against Poor**

**Air Quality.** Maintain development and building standards that protect residents from exposure to poor air quality, including wildfire smoke, and traffic-related pollution, with enhanced protection measures for residential areas near freeways and other high-pollution corridors.

**Funding for Clean Air Facilities.** Support and secure funding for clean air facilities that provide refuge during poor air quality and extreme heat events.

This includes maintaining the existing permanent clean air facility, incorporating air filtration systems in new and renovated resilience centers, supporting comparable private facilities, and prioritizing locations accessible to transit-dependent and vulnerable populations.

**Prioritizing Air Quality Protection for Vulnerable Populations.** Prioritize the protection of vulnerable populations from adverse air quality impacts through appropriate land use decisions and development standards.

**Community Partnerships for Equitable Healthcare Access.** Work with local community-based organizations to improve access to healthcare, preventive services, and address health inequities throughout the community.

## Do You Have Any Suggestions?



# Severe Weather



## Description of Issue

Severe weather events, including intense rainstorms, high winds, and thunderstorms, are a growing threat to East Palo Alto's safety and infrastructure. Severe weather can damage buildings and utilities, disrupt transportation, and leave residents without power for long periods of time. Heavy rainstorms can overwhelm storm drains and cause flooding, while high winds topple trees and power lines, especially when soils are saturated. Thunderstorms, though less common in the Bay Area, can bring lightning, flash floods, and additional wind damage.

Severe weather disproportionately affects certain groups in East Palo Alto. Low-income households may lack reliable transportation for evacuation or the financial means to relocate temporarily. Older adults and people with chronic illnesses face higher health risks during power outages and temperature fluctuations. Residents of mobile homes are especially vulnerable due to the structural limitations of older manufactured housing.

Climate change is expected to worsen severe weather impacts in the future. Fewer but more intense storms will increase the risk of flooding and infrastructure damage, while longer dry periods between storms may cause soils to harden, further reducing their ability to absorb rain. Power outages, including Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events, can compound these risks, particularly for residents who rely on electricity for medical needs or who lack access to backup systems.

## Summary of Current City Policies

- Implementing infrastructure hardening measures to strengthen stormwater systems, utility infrastructure, and backup power at essential facilities to maintain operations during severe weather events.
- Enhancing early warning and community alert systems with multilingual communications and coordinating with PG&E to provide advance notice and resources during Public Safety Power Shutoff events.
- Establishing rapid post-storm recovery protocols focused on clearing evacuation routes, removing debris, and restoring critical services, especially in vulnerable neighborhoods.
- Supporting property owners with severe weather protection measures, including design guidelines and tree management programs, and collaborating with utilities to improve power outage resilience and expand backup power access.

## Draft Policy Approaches

**Severe Weather Infrastructure Resilience.** Implement proactive infrastructure hardening measures to withstand atmospheric rivers, windstorms, and severe precipitation events, including upgrades to stormwater systems, strengthening of critical utility infrastructure, and installation of backup power systems at essential facilities to maintain operations during extended outages.

**Severe Weather Early Warning and Response.** Enhance community alert systems specifically for severe weather events, including atmospheric rivers and windstorms, with multilingual communications that provide actionable guidance for residents. Coordinate with Pacific Gas & Electric regarding Public Safety Power Shutoff events to ensure vulnerable populations receive advance notice and resource support.

**Post-Storm Recovery and Debris Management.** Establish rapid response protocols for post-storm recovery that prioritize clearing of evacuation routes and restoration of services to critical facilities. Develop pre-positioned contracts for debris removal and infrastructure repair to reduce recovery time, particularly in areas serving vulnerable populations identified in the vulnerability assessment.

**Private Property Severe Weather Resilience.** Support property owners in implementing severe weather protection measures for homes and businesses, with priority assistance for vulnerable populations and essential local businesses.

**Utility Resilience and Backup Power Support.** Work with PG&E to enhance community resilience to power outages through improved utility coordination and expanded access to backup power systems.

## Do You Have Any Suggestions?



EAST PALO ALTO STUDY SESSION 7-28-25

# Extreme Heat and Drought



## Description of the Issue

Extreme heat poses serious risks to public health, infrastructure, and the environment in East Palo Alto. In East Palo Alto, an extreme heat day occurs when temperatures exceed 92.4°F. These temperatures increase risks of heat-related illnesses, dehydration, respiratory issues, and strain infrastructure and energy systems. Older adults, low-income households without air conditioning, and people with disabilities relying on medical devices, mobile home residents, and outdoor workers are among those who are most severely affected by extreme heat. Heat impacts are worsened by urban heat island effects in densely built areas with limited tree cover, such as neighborhoods near Cesar Chavez Ravenswood Middle School and commercial zones along Bay Road. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency of extreme heat days from 5 to 25 annually by late century and warm nights from 5 to 100 days annually, making heat a growing, persistent threat.

Climate change can intensify drought conditions, which creates hardships for low-income households facing high water costs, food-insecure residents affected by rising prices, and community food programs reliant on local water supplies. Drought also increases wildfire risk by drying vegetation and weakening ecosystems. While the City has taken recent action to improve water access and diversify water supplies, East Palo Alto still faces challenges. Climate change is expected to increase drought frequency and severity, while harder soils may reduce groundwater levels and worsen flooding risks during heavy storms.

## Summary of Current Policies

### Extreme Heat

- Expanding urban tree canopy, green infrastructure, and shade structures in heat-vulnerable areas, including schools, parks, bus stops, and neighborhoods with limited tree cover.
- Supporting heat-resilient buildings by encouraging sustainable, energy-efficient cooling features and weatherization in both owner-occupied and rental properties, with targeted incentives and expedited permitting.
- Increasing community resilience through public education, minimum cooling requirements for rentals, and coordinated emergency response plans for extreme heat events.

### Drought

- Installing rainwater harvesting systems, drought-tolerant landscaping, and smart irrigation technologies on public and private properties to enhance drought resilience and reduce potable water use.
- Promoting alternative water systems and expanding community education on water conservation and drought preparedness through updated codes, incentives, and multilingual outreach.

## Draft Policy Approaches

### Extreme Heat

**Drought-Tolerant Green Infrastructure.** Promote the use of drought-tolerant green infrastructure, including landscaped areas, as part of cooling strategies in public and private spaces. Prioritize installation of green infrastructure and trees in areas most vulnerable to heat.

**Urban Tree Canopy.** Expand the urban tree canopy to reduce extreme heat impacts and support carbon sequestration, while proactively managing and maintaining the urban forest to increase tree resilience and reduce the risk of downed trees during severe weather.

**Installation of Shade Structures and Trees.** Install shade structures and trees, both green and built infrastructure, at parks, schools, along public streets, walkways, and trails, and at other public spaces to reduce ground surface temperatures.

**Sustainable Features for Rental Properties.** Create incentive programs and requirements for rental property owners to incorporate sustainable, energy-efficient cooling features to protect tenants during extreme heat events. Support financing efforts to increase property owner and tenant access to these features.

**Rental Housing Climate Requirements.** Establish minimum cooling requirements for rental housing to protect tenant health during extreme heat events, including

requirements for landlords to provide adequate cooling systems in proportion to rent charged.

**Extreme Heat Emergency Response.** Develop comprehensive emergency response protocols for extreme heat events to protect public health and ensure coordinated community support consistent with AB 2684 requirements.

### Drought

**Drought-Tolerant Landscaping Standards.** Ensure drought-tolerant landscaping for new development complies with state Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance standards while ensuring landscaping choices do not create wildfire or flooding risks.

**Public Right-of-Way Rainwater Harvesting.** Install rainwater catchment and bioretention systems in public rights-of-way to support groundwater recharge and drought resilience.

**Municipal Landscape Drought Adaptation.** Retrofit City-owned landscapes, parks, and facilities with drought-resistant and native plant species.

**Community Water Stewardship Education.** Provide comprehensive multilingual education programs that teach residents advanced water conservation practices and drought preparedness strategies.

**Alternative Water Systems Development.** Promote development and use of greywater, recycled water, and other alternative water systems to reduce dependence on potable water supplies.

## Do You Have Any Suggestions?



EAST PALO ALTO STUDY SESSION 7-28-25

# Hazardous Materials



## Description of Issue

Hazardous materials are substances that can pose serious risks to human health and the environment if released. In East Palo Alto, many areas (particularly within the Ravenswood district) are affected by contaminated soil and groundwater from past industrial activity, former gas stations, and agricultural uses. These sites, known as brownfields, often contain pollutants such as PCBs, metals, and petrochemicals, which can expose nearby communities to potential health hazards and limit new development. The City has made significant efforts to address these issues, including the adoption of the Ravenswood Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Specific Plan, which prioritizes the cleanup and safe reuse of contaminated lands. The City continues to work with regional and state agencies, such as the County's Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA) and the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, to ensure the proper cleanup, monitoring, and management of hazardous materials. As sea level rise and rising groundwater threaten to spread contamination further, ongoing coordination and investment in remediation will remain essential to protecting public health and supporting equitable development.

## Summary of Current Policies

- Monitoring and updating known and suspected contaminated sites in coordination with San Mateo County Environmental Health Services to reduce community exposure to hazardous substances.
- Regulating hazardous materials and waste through ongoing coordination with federal, state, and local agencies, including the CUPA and the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, to administer Risk Management Plans for businesses.
- Requiring safe siting, design, and transport of hazardous materials and the facilities that store them by coordinating with Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol on designated routes and avoiding residential areas and schools where feasible.
- Preventing groundwater contamination by prohibiting new hazardous materials facilities in emergent groundwater areas and requiring existing high-risk sites to implement monitoring, containment, and emergency response protocols.

## Draft Policy Approaches

**Contamination.** Avoid or minimize risk to the community from exposure to contaminated soils or groundwater.

Management of hazardous materials. Continue to cooperate with federal, state, and county agencies to effectively regulate the management of hazardous materials and hazardous waste.

**Risk Management Plans.** Continue to cooperate with the Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA) for East Palo Alto (the County of San Mateo Health System) and the Menlo Park Fire Protection District to administer Risk Management Plans for businesses within the City.

**Safe Siting and Design for Hazardous Material Facilities.** Protect public health through appropriate siting and design requirements for facilities that use, manufacture, or store hazardous materials.

**Prohibit Hazardous Facilities in Groundwater Areas.** Prohibit new facilities that use, manufacture, store, or transport hazardous materials in emergent groundwater areas, as shown on Figure 10-8.

**Gas pipeline emergency prevention and planning.** Coordinate with the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, and other local, regional, and state agencies to ensure that emergency evacuation plans are in place and any major pipelines in the community are appropriately inspected and marked to prevent accidental rupture.

**Mitigate Hazardous Material Risks from Groundwater.** Require existing facilities in emergent groundwater areas that handle hazardous materials to implement comprehensive monitoring, containment, and emergency response measures to prevent contamination from groundwater intrusion. Establish requirements for relocating or decommissioning highest-risk facilities based on vulnerability assessments.

## Do You Have Any Suggestions?



EAST PALO ALTO STUDY SESSION 7-28-25

# Emergency Response and Preparedness



## Description of Issue

East Palo Alto faces a range of emergency management challenges due to its exposure to multiple hazards, including earthquakes, flooding, hazardous materials, and severe weather events. While the City coordinates with regional partners such as the Menlo Park Fire Protection District and the San Mateo County Department of Emergency Management, gaps remain in evacuation planning, emergency communications, and resource capacity. East Palo Alto is participating in the county-wide All-Hazards Evacuation Plan, which began in 2024 and is expected to finish by 2026 with public outreach and emergency drills. City staff, including the Police Department and others, coordinate with regional partners to manage emergencies. The San Mateo County Department of Emergency Management serves as the lead agency for countywide planning and coordination and supports local jurisdictions. The City supports community preparedness through SMC Alert, the County's emergency alert system, and various volunteer programs, including Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) trained by the Menlo Park Fire Protection District.

## Summary of Current Policies

- Promoting community preparedness by offering localized emergency training, supporting CERT programs, partnering with community organizations, and exploring a paid Safety Ambassador program.
- Continuing hazard mitigation planning in collaboration with Association of Bay Area Governments, FEMA, and San Mateo County, and integrating the adopted San Mateo Multijurisdictional Local Hazard Mitigation Plan by reference into the Safety Element.
- Improving risk awareness and resilience by encouraging risk evaluations by property owners, locating critical facilities outside hazard areas when possible, and ensuring city facilities are designed for resilience and energy efficiency.
- Strengthening emergency response and recovery by maintaining and coordinating emergency operations plans, evacuation planning, alert systems, mutual aid, and post-disaster recovery resources, especially for vulnerable populations.

## Draft Policy Approaches

**Community preparedness.** Reduce harm from natural hazards by promoting a culture of preparedness in the community through regular, localized emergency preparedness training programs that include practice drills and scenario-based exercises. Provide public education relating to seismic and flooding hazards.

**Emergency access routes.** Collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions, emergency responders, and Caltrans to ensure the ongoing maintenance and readiness of potential evacuation routes serving East Palo Alto.

**Reconstruction.** Following a major disaster, ensure expedient, sound, and equitable reconstruction of the affected community through measures such as development of a Pre-Disaster and Recovery Action Plan that focus on community resilience, sustainability, and an evaluation for redevelopment potential following a major disaster.

**Promote Community Preparedness.** Support and promote community preparedness groups, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) with Menlo Park Fire Protection District, and other preparedness training for residents and businesses.

**Preparation Assistance.** In partnership with community-based organizations, provide financial and labor assistance to help community members prepare for disaster conditions, emphasizing the needs of low-resourced community members, older adults, and persons with access and functional needs.

**Safety Ambassadors.** Explore creating a paid Safety Ambassador program to support efforts by local experts to improve community resilience.

**Community Resilience Centers.** Coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions, school districts, recreation and park districts, and community-based organizations to establish and maintain a network of equitably located emergency shelters, community resilience centers, and alternate care sites that provide emergency resources and services throughout the community.

**Coordinated Evacuation Efforts.** Coordinate with transit agencies, school districts, community service organizations, and faith-based organizations to assist with evacuation efforts, ensuring evacuation services are available to vulnerable populations, including those with limited English proficiency, limited mobility, or limited access to transportation, communication, and other lifeline resources and services.

**Emergency Alert Systems.** Ensure emergency alert systems provide community members with alerts about upcoming or current emergency events in languages and formats accessible to the entire community. Use diverse outreach methods and partner with trusted community organizations to reach all segments of the community.

**Equitable Emergency Response.** Work with emergency service providers to ensure response times and service levels in East Palo Alto are comparable to surrounding communities, with regular monitoring and reporting of response time data.

## Do You Have Any Suggestions?