

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

November 7, 2018

Ogden City Review of Military Training Operation



Ogden City extends apology and explanation for Friday night's military training operation

OGDEN, UT –

Our Apologies

My staff and I sincerely apologize to all Ogden City residents who were affected in any way by the military training exercise held the night of Friday, November 2. We recognize that the exercise frightened and upset many residents, particularly vulnerable populations, and we are truly sorry for underestimating the full nature of the exercise and the impact the exercise would have on the residents.

I have investigated the matter and now want to report in fair detail my findings. Additionally, the Ogden City Council leadership did its own investigation by meeting with city staff and requiring a full accounting from all who participated in the planning and execution of the training exercise.

What Happened?

Staff for the Ogden City's Community & Economic Development Department (CED) was contacted in July 2018 by F3EA, a contractor that coordinates and supports training exercises for the military. F3EA was developing a Special Forces training exercise at several sites in Utah and Idaho and wanted to host an exercise in Ogden to simulate a realistic urban environment. They asked to use the Swift Building, which is owned by the Ogden City Redevelopment Agency (RDA). Due to environmental concerns at the Swift Building, CED staff worked to identify other publicly owned sites that could support the exercise. CED staff discussed the former Hostess Bakery in Downtown and the Rite Aid/IGA Building in East Central. The Hostess Bakery was slated for demolition prior to the exercise date, which left the IGA Building as the only remaining potential site for the training exercise.

F3EA assessed the IGA Building and determined it would be an ideal location for the Special Forces training requirements. F3EA provided Ogden City with a land use agreement that would allow the IGA Building to be used for the exercise. CED staff reviewed the agreement with the City Attorney's office and identified an initial list of concerns about the potential impact to the community, including the scope, timing, and duration of the exercise and the citizen notification process. F3EA responded that the training activities would primarily occur inside the IGA Building, the exercise would be held shortly after sunset, and affected residents would receive notification 24 hours before the event through door-to-door visits and reverse 911 calls. F3EA's response assuaged the concerns of CED staff and the City Attorney's office and they believed F3EA's plan and commitment to minimizing the impact of the exercises on the community would be sufficient.

In August, Ogden City held a conference call with F3EA, CED, the City Attorney's office, and the Ogden Police Department (OPD). They again discussed the importance of minimizing the impact of the training exercises on the community and providing proper notification to residents. After receiving assurances

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from F3EA of its commitment to contain the exercises as discussed, coordinate closely with OPD, and provide notice to city residences, city staff concluded, although in hindsight incorrectly, that the military exercise could proceed in the same fashion as many other training exercises routinely conducted in Ogden City.

In September, F3EA sent personnel to Ogden to meet with OPD and visit the IGA Building. Its team met with OPD to discuss the proposed training activities and support from OPD. CED staff also provided access to the IGA Building, so that F3EA could determine how to stage the exercise.

On October 26, F3EA notified city staff that the event would be held at 10:00 pm on Friday, November 2. F3EA's personnel arrived on November 1 to stage the exercise in the IGA Building and provided a more detailed event briefing to OPD. OPD felt comfortable that the timing of the event and proper notification of residents would mitigate impacts to the community. Around 8:00 pm on November 2, city staff attempted to notify residents of the exercise using Code Red, an emergency notification system. OPD also initially planned to publish social media posts to notify residents. However, they grew concerned about the need to control the scene and made a command decision not to publish the posts. Dispatch was informed of the exercise so that they could share information with any concerned citizens.

Prior to the scheduled start time, F3EA informed OPD that the exercise would need to be delayed. After several delays, the exercise commenced around 12:30 am and concluded 45 minutes later. OPD provided law enforcement officers during the exercise to control the scene and prevent the public from entering the area of activity.

What Went Wrong? What Lessons Were Learned?

On Tuesday, November 7, city staff reported to the Ogden City Council leadership and explained what went wrong. First, there was a breakdown in interdepartmental coordination, particularly with the project hand-off from CED to OPD. This resulted in collectively underestimating the intensity of the proposed activities, failure to communicate the initial concerns about community impact, and lack of enforcement of the initial commitments made by F3EA. Additionally, communication with City Administration and City Council about the project and its potential impacts was lacking. Had this communication taken place, the scope of activities (including the use of helicopters) would have been limited and the time of day restricted. In the future, projects with this level of potential impact will be reviewed at executive interdepartmental meetings and shared with City Council.

City staff also explained that in hindsight, they failed to create and follow a communication plan with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities. Although they believed F3EA would provide door-to-door notification to the affected area, they failed to verify its completion, and proper notice was not given. Key city personnel were not informed of the exercise, limiting the city's ability to broadly disseminate information. Most critically, the planned social media posts were not published and the Code Red notification system failed to reach the intended residents. In an emergency situation, Code Red alerts are also sent through the federal Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS). IPAWS then notifies all

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cell phones using towers in the affected area. However, for situations that do not meet the definition of an emergency, Code Red only alerts individuals who have opted into the system. The city strongly encourages all residents to opt into Code Red to receive important notifications about situations that do not qualify as an emergency. Residents are also encouraged to set their phones to receive emergency notifications, using their phone settings.

Finally, the city believes that non-digital methods such as door hangers, electronic message boards, and boots on the ground remain essential to keep the public informed in crisis situations and drills.

Conclusion

The goal of the city in hosting this training exercise was to support our nation's military readiness and improve interoperability between Special Forces and local law enforcement. City staff believed the city could support this exercise with minimal impact to the community, but collectively agree they underestimated the intensity of the training activities and failed to effectively coordinate and communicate, both internally and with the public. We take this failure very seriously and commit to continue to review the situation and implement improvements to the city's public communication and interdepartmental coordination, particularly for drills, emergencies, and crisis situations.

I appreciate that the community and City Council are holding me and my staff accountable for the distress caused by this event. We have spent the last few days conducting an internal review of what happened and how we plan to improve. We believe this review and dialogue with the community, council members and city departments will greatly benefit the community as we apply lessons learned from this event to better serve our citizens, families, friends, and neighbors as we move forward.

Again, we apologize to each of you affected by the drill Friday evening. We commit to learn from our errors and improve our processes to ensure these mistakes are never repeated. Further, I commit to coordinate with City Council leadership to determine other possible public outreaches to those affected by the drills.

Mayor Mike Caldwell