

FACT SHEET: PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Purpose and Requirements

State law requires general plans to include a Safety Element to identify and address natural and human-made hazards, as well as climate adaptation and resiliency. While not a required component of the Safety Element, strategies to improve public safety are included. The City of Oakland believes that realizing public safety is a foundational component to creating a vibrant and thriving community for everyone.

As part of the City of Oakland's General Plan Update, the Safety Element presents a framework for minimizing risks posed by these hazards that may impact residents' health and welfare.

Safety and Racial Equity Goals

A guiding principle of Oakland's General Plan update is to advance the City's mission to "intentionally integrate, on a Citywide basis, the principle of 'fair and just' in all the City does in order to achieve equitable opportunities for all people and communities."¹

The Safety Element's goals and policies prioritize "frontline communities", or vulnerable communities that will be affected 'first and worst' from climate change and environmental hazard impacts.

Social vulnerability indicators include:



Renters



Under 5 years old



Very low income



Non-U.S. Citizens



Without a vehicle



People with disabilities



Single parent families



Communities of color



65+ living alone



Limited English proficiency



Without a high school degree



Severely housing cost burdened

¹ Oakland Municipal Code Section 2.29.170.1

Public Safety and Equity

Public safety is a broad and complex topic, spanning public health, crime reduction, and violence intervention. Many public safety institutions, however, have systemic racism or violence deeply ingrained, which can result in inequitable or harmful outcomes, especially for Black Oaklanders and people of color.

The rate of use-of-force incidence on Black residents by police is 1.74 times higher than the average for all groups between 2016 and 2019. Residents in majority Hispanic/Latinx census tracts experienced the greatest rate of violent crimes between 2016 and 2020, nearly double the overall average.

Oakland communities and City departments are exploring other ways to build an equitable public safety system in Oakland, which includes addressing the root causes of violence and crime. Oakland's Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce emphasizes investment in alternatives in policing through other governmental and community-based organizations and continued commitment to officer accountability in the Oakland Police Department (OPD). The City's Department of Violence Prevention also offers services focused on the prevention and intervention of violence in addition to addressing broader community trauma.



Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Other techniques, such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) can help make environments feel safer. CPTED design focuses on increasing visibility and marking defined spaces, such as having well-lit spaces, using short walls and pavement treatments, and landscaping to avoid creating hiding spots. CPTED guidelines should be tailored to response to a community's context, diversity and unique safety issues and applied to new development across the city.

OTHER RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

- **The California Department of Public Health:** Contains the Emergency Preparedness Office, distributes funds to local health departments for disaster planning, and manages the Climate Change & Health Equity Program.
- **The Alameda County Sheriff's Office:** Full-service law enforcement agency that spans Alameda County.
- **The BART Police Department:** Oversees safety within our transit system.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Emergency preparedness and response systems and strategies for events ranging from earthquakes to fire to terrorism to public health crises are essential to address the needs of all Oakland residents during times of emergency.

Air quality improvement efforts in West Oakland have been ongoing for over a decade, culminating in the AB 617 [West Oakland Community Action Plan](#) (WOCAP). Most recently, the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (WOEIP) and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) studied the block-by-block variations in concentrations of air pollutants including nitrogen oxides and black carbon. These are highest in industrial areas adjacent to stretches of major roadways like I-980 and I-880.

Community Resilience and Response

Resilience hubs are defined as “community-serving facilities that support residents year-round and support resource distribution and onsite services before, during, or after a natural hazard event.” Public facilities such as libraries, senior centers, cultural centers, parks, and recreational centers can function as essential service facilities during emergency response as shelters and local assistance centers. For example, nine libraries across Oakland are offered as air-conditioned centers during extreme heat events. Community-based organizations also play an essential role in building local resilience and adaptive capacity in Oakland.



Oakland Fire Department

The Oakland Fire Department is the primary emergency response service provider for the city and operates 25 fire stations across Oakland. The Emergency Management Services Division (EMSD) also works within OFD to respond and lessen any potential hazard. These stations, shown above, play a part in emergency resilience and response.



Alerts and Evacuation

Emergency alert and assistance systems include city-wide emergency sirens, fire and law enforcement vehicle loudspeakers, 9-1-1, agency websites, and other digital tools. For example, Zonehaven provides residents with real-time maps and information online to guide evacuation in the event of an emergency and AC alert rapidly shares emergency alerts to people who live, work in, or visit Alameda County.

The City is committed to providing support to linguistically isolated residents, residents with a disability, and residents with other functional needs in the event of an emergency.²³

Evacuation occurs only when a serious threat to public safety exists. The Oakland Fire and Police Departments are responsible for the authorization, direction, routing, and relocation of people from their homes, schools, and places of business. Public transit agencies will also play a role in emergency evacuation strategies. The I-580, I-880, and I-980 are the primary regional evacuation routes in Oakland.

In the event of a fire, conditions related to emergency response and evacuation are currently not adequate to serve the population living in the VHFHSZ. The City can engage in roadway management strategies to improve traffic flow such as moving all highway traffic in one direction or identifying additional access routes.

Vulnerable Populations

Individuals who cannot afford access to private transportation and services such as hotels may be disadvantaged during emergency evacuation events. Approximately 15 percent of Oakland's households lack access to a household vehicle, and may be at greater risk of harm because they lack the capacity to evacuate. Community programs like Communities of Oakland Respond to Emergencies (CORE) can help equip residents with the tools to provide additional mutual aid, resources, and support during emergencies, particularly in harder-to-reach neighborhoods.

² <https://oaklandca.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/w/DOWD007854.pdf>

³ Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Addressing the Needs of Individuals and others with Access and Functional Needs



Capital Improvement Needs

Many capital needs throughout the city are related to emergency preparedness and response. Currently, the Police Administration Building and certain fire stations have significant deferred maintenance items that impact their operational status. Approximately 25 fire stations and one training center require maintenance, and Fire Station 4, one of the busiest in the city, is currently targeted for replacement.



The OakWifi Initiative is also listed in the 2021-2023 Capital Improvements program as an unfunded capital improvement with an anticipated cost of \$20,000,000. The OakWifi Initiative provides free Wifi to Oakland residents to help close the digital divide, as an estimated 94,000 Oakland residents currently don't have internet access.