



King County



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE





APRIL 1, 2024

## Follow-up on Audit of King County's Pandemic Response

The Department of Human Resources (DHR), Office of Emergency Management (OEM), and the Finance and Business Operations Division (FBOD) have begun to improve King County's processes for employee safety and procurement during emergencies. In 2023, DHR hired key safety division staff responsible for monitoring agency compliance with safety protocols. DHR is close to finishing its update to its 2015 Accident Prevention Plan & Safety Policies and Procedures with lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic. This document will consolidate emergency safety roles and responsibilities that constitute the County's safety framework. OEM and FBOD made progress addressing recommendations from their pandemic after-action review (AAR), including simplifying the emergency resource request structure and training staff on its use.

**DHR has not clearly communicated the role of county agencies in its emergency safety framework. This may lead to increased risks, particularly for agencies that do not normally handle physical safety issues.** During the pandemic, county agencies that did not already have staff assigned to routine worker safety were uncertain how to address worker safety and had difficulty engaging DHR for help. DHR's 2024 workplan includes a gap analysis of safety protocols in county agencies. Senior leaders said they will use this engagement opportunity to ensure agency staff understand their roles and responsibilities during emergencies.

Of the four remaining audit recommendations:

 <span style="float: right;">0</span> <b>DONE</b>	 <span style="float: right;">3</span> <b>PROGRESS</b>	 <span style="float: right;">0</span> <b>OPEN</b>	 <span style="float: right;">1</span> <b>CLOSED</b>
<b>FULLY IMPLEMENTED</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.	<b>PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.	<b>REMAIN UNRESOLVED</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.	<b>NO LONGER APPLICABLE</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.

See details below for implementation status of each recommendation.

## Recommendation 1

PROGRESS



**The County Executive should work with the Department of Human Resources to establish a clear framework for employee safety that includes specific roles and responsibilities during emergencies and mechanisms to monitor the development and implementation of safety protocols.**

STATUS UPDATE: DHR leaders stated that they are in the midst of refining and documenting the framework for employee safety in emergencies. Currently, several documents define roles and responsibilities for staff involved in emergency response, such as the *Accident Prevention Program Safety Policies and Procedures (APP)* and job descriptions for the Central Employee Services' deputy division director and safety manager. DHR filled the division director position in early 2023 and hired the safety manager in fall 2023; these positions have been integral in developing the safety framework. Staff are currently updating the *APP* by including lessons learned from the pandemic. They anticipate completing the update in spring 2024.

Monitoring the development and implementation of safety protocols is a responsibility of DHR's safety manager. DHR's 2024 workplan includes a gap analysis of safety programs across county agencies. Managers stated that they plan to use this engagement as an opportunity to emphasize the responsibility of county agencies to consult and coordinate with the Central Employee Services safety team on safety planning for and during emergency events.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, DHR should finalize the updates to the *APP*. In addition, the King County Executive should work with DHR to clearly define, document, and communicate the roles and responsibilities for agency staff in developing and implementing safety protocols for employees in emergencies.

## Recommendation 2




CLOSED



**The County Executive should work with leadership in other branches of government and separately elected officials across King County to develop and document mechanisms to clarify roles and responsibilities and enhance cross-branch collaboration on employee safety during emergencies.**

STATUS UPDATE: King County Executive Office leaders stated that they have ongoing collaboration with legislative branch leadership, including discussions about employee safety, as necessary. They indicated that the County Executive continues to seek opportunities to collaborate with the judicial branch around employee safety during emergencies. This recommendation has not been fully implemented, but we are closing it because there are several other open audit

recommendations related to cross-branch collaboration. The Auditor’s Office will continue to monitor the issue in other venues.

Recommendation 3	On April 3, 2023	CLOSED	
Recommendation 4	On April 3, 2023	CLOSED	
Recommendation 5		PROGRESS	

**The County Executive should conduct and document a timely lessons learned analysis on procurement during the COVID-19 pandemic including purchasing conducted by individual agencies and develop and implement a plan to address any issues identified.**

STATUS UPDATE: OEM finalized its AAR of COVID-19 response operations in December 2022, and it was sent to department directors and the Executive Office on June 26, 2023. The AAR contained 76 items for improvement, including eight related to resource management and logistics. OEM and FBOD managers reported that they completed three items (detailed in Recommendation 6, below), and that they made progress on the remaining five:

1. OEM should incorporate equipment and supply projections/needs into the incident planning process, including a long-term planning process for those resources that need additional lead time to secure.
2. OEM should develop training programs and standard operating procedures to ensure all personnel are familiar with the emergency incident resource management systems and processes, including filling out and approving requests.
3. OEM should ensure King County’s Emergency Operations Center Resource Management Branch includes processes that include inter-departmental and inter-agency coordination efforts to gain situational awareness of and information on resource needs, inventories, and projections.
4. County leadership should ensure that the Emergency Operations Center monitors, manages, and coordinates emergency resources.
5. County leadership should support OEM in developing policies and procedures that ensure coordinated resource ordering and consistency with procurement regulations during emergency events.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, OEM should implement the remaining five improvement plan items (listed above) from the COVID-19 AAR.

## Recommendation 6

PROGRESS



**The County Executive should work with the Office of Emergency Management and the Finance and Business Operations Division to update emergency plans to develop and document efficient and effective procurement processes that leverage procurement expertise during supply shortages.**

STATUS UPDATE: OEM completed three items for improvement that related to this recommendation from the COVID-19 AAR:

1. OEM and FBOD worked together to review emergency operations resource needs and build a single simplified logistical structure to support operations.
2. OEM developed and implemented a training program to ensure all personnel involved in emergency operations are familiar with the resource request process.
3. OEM worked with key partners across the County to develop a consistent approach to resource requests for all emergency operations.

OEM and FBOD are working to develop a *Resource Management Job Aid* to document emergency procurement policies and procedures for staff.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, OEM and FBOD should complete Recommendation 5 and finalize and distribute the *Resource Management Job Aid*.

---

Luc Poon conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at [KCAO@KingCounty.gov](mailto:KCAO@KingCounty.gov) or 206-477-1033.