

**County of Monterey – 2025 CSAC Challenge Awards****Executive Summary
Hygiene Hubs**

OVERVIEW – Monterey County’s Environmental Health Bureau established innovative hygiene hubs to ensure safe, equitable storm recovery for Pajaro residents lacking water and sewage infrastructure.

CHALLENGE – In early 2023, severe storms and flooding forced Pajaro residents to evacuate. Upon return, they faced homes without running water or sewage and rapidly spreading mold. The county needed to prevent a public health crisis while enabling safe, timely reoccupation. The unique urgency and scale of the sanitation challenge, especially for a vulnerable, diverse community, required immediate, equity-minded action.

SOLUTION – Monterey County’s Environmental Health Bureau led a rapid, multi-agency response. The Bureau established hygiene hubs offering self-contained toilets, showers, laundry, food, water, and information. Multilingual outreach ensured all residents received guidance on food, water, and wastewater safety.

Free well water testing and septic system support were provided, and disaster debris was efficiently managed. Free coliform bacteria testing vouchers were offered for private wells affected by flooding. EHB also provided step-by-step guidance for disinfecting and restoring water systems. Residents received clear instructions on discarding contaminated food, cleaning utensils, and safely reopening food businesses. Resources were available in English and Spanish.

For wastewater and septic systems, the Bureau provided advice on safe use during and after floods detailing when to avoid pumping and how to check for damage. Disaster debris was managed efficiently with curbside removal, hazardous waste collection, and emergency transfer stations set up for storm-related waste. Working alongside local agencies and the Red Cross, the Bureau also supported shelter operations and distributed meals, water, and essential supplies.

This project supports the County of Monterey's broader community resiliency initiatives. Since 2016, Monterey County has worked to move toward equity-mindedness. Under the County's definition—drawn from Race Forward—racial justice means systemic fair treatment of people from all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. The County's Department of Emergency Management has adopted equity-mindedness as part of its community resiliency initiative, which includes six strategic areas. One key focus is building healthier communities—recognizing that access to high-quality healthcare, clean air and water, healthy food, and outdoor activities makes communities more resilient and better able to withstand disasters.

INNOVATION – This program stands out among California counties with its' community-centered hygiene hubs serving as temporary centers for essential sanitation and recovery. The approach integrated multilingual communication and cross-agency collaboration ensuring even the most underserved residents had access to critical services and information during recovery.

RESULTS – The program enabled Pajaro residents to return home safely and quickly preventing a sanitation crisis and reducing health risks. The hubs operated twenty-four hours a day for fifty-three days. Over 1,000 inspections were conducted, 43,000 meals distributed, and thousands accessed hygiene services. The initiative improved public trust, streamlined service delivery, and strengthened internal emergency response coordination.

REPLICABILITY – Other California counties can replicate this model by establishing hygiene hubs, prioritizing equity, and coordinating multilingual outreach. The program's structure, partnerships, and resources can serve as a best practice for disaster recovery and community resilience statewide.

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ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- [2023 Winter Storms-Atmospheric River Disaster Recovery Resources](#)
- [Pajaro Recovery](#)
- [2023 Pineapple Express Disaster Recovery Resources](#)
- [Environmental Health - Flood Information](#)