Earthquake, tsunami: reminder to be prepared

By now we have all seen the images and heard the harrowing first-hand accounts of the enormous earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan late yesterday evening. The toll on the people of Japan has yet to be fully measured, but clearly our hearts and prayers must go out to those who have lost loved ones, livelihoods and their homes from this tragic natural disaster.

One clear message has already begun to emerge from this disaster: it could have been much worse without prior disaster preparedness efforts.

Snohomish County has been the leader in coordinating regional response and preparedness efforts for all types of disasters since 2006 when we formed a County-level Department of Emergency Management. Since that time, Snohomish County has successfully responded to six federally declared disaster events, and we are continually adopting the lessons-learned from other disaster preparedness and response efforts around the globe.

The earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan last night reflect a very real threat to life and property right here in our own backyard presented by the Cascadia Subduction Zone – fault lines located just off our coast.

Washington State has a network of tsunami sirens and warning systems in place in case of a tsunami. Late last night, we were in contact with Washington State Emergency Management Department and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center assessing potential tsunami impacts to Snohomish County. Were the local threat greater, several methods could have been implemented to warn residents of the need to evacuate; including the emergency alert system and Reverse 911 which has been used successfully in prior flooding events in Snohomish County.
You too can take steps to ensure that your family and neighbors are prepared should disaster strike.

- Make a plan to be on your own with your family for at least 72 hours – experts recommend being prepared for as long as 7 days. Go to www.ready.gov or our local website www.whodependsonyou.com for more information.

- Develop out of area contacts to relay information about yourself and your family to those who care about you. Out of area contacts are much easier for others to reach in times of natural disasters.

- Understand the evacuation areas near you, particularly if you are near a coastal area or are subject to major flooding from damaged dams or high river levels.

- Use common sense. If you are new to an area, ask those around you for advice. Listen to warnings from emergency management experts and stay calm.

Thank you,

The SnoStat system tracks how well the County is delivering services, the costs of those services, and the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

Simply visit our SnoStat Web site.

Contact me:
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Send me an email,

Sincerely,

Aaron Reardon

County efforts lead to major drop in flood insurance rates for residents

Snohomish County residents with flood insurance policies for properties in the 100-year floodplain will find their annual premiums reduced due to the county’s improved rating in the National Flood Insurance Program’s Community Rating System (CRS).

On Monday, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regional administrators recognized the county for improving its CRS rating from a Class 5 to a Class 4. This recognition was based on FEMA’s recent audit of the county’s floodplain management activities.

The audit resulted in additional credit being granted to the county for its improved practices and regulations in stormwater management. Surface Water Management fees covered the cost of implementing these improvements.

The Class 4 rating provides a 30 percent discount for National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) policies issued or renewed for properties
in Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs). These are high-risk areas that would be inundated by a base flood – a flood having a 1-percent chance of occurring in a given year. Properties with federally backed mortgages within this flood zone must carry flood insurance.

“Working together to improve stormwater management and reduce flood risk throughout the county pays big dividends for our government, the community, taxpayers and flood insurance policy holders,” Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon said. “The county has fared relatively well during recent flood events, partly due to our investments in flood control projects and our commitment to stormwater maintenance.”

In addition, mitigation of flood activities during the past decade has been so successful that Snohomish County is now actively pursuing the consolidation of all mitigation activities, including the discussion of a full-time mitigation division in county government.

“This type of dedication and vision to reducing disaster impacts is a natural evolution of Snohomish County’s growth during the past 10 years,” Reardon said.

About 2,800 homeowners in Snohomish County maintain NFIP policies. Nearly 1,900 of those policies are for properties within SFHAs. The average annual premium for structures in the SFHAs of Snohomish County is $750. The improved rating will save $225 annually per SFHA policy.

The Community Rating System program is an incentive program of the National Flood Insurance Program, which rewards communities that go beyond the minimum requirements to reduce flood damage in the community.

The county was accepted into the CRS program in 2006 as a CRS Class 5 community.

Reardon helps launch community partnership
On Wednesday, Executive Reardon joined Frontier Communications VP of Operations Jon Fleischmann and the Executive Director of the Snohomish County Red Cross, Chuck Morrison, in announcing a partnership in support of CPR and defibrillator training, disaster relief and support for military families.

Frontier presented the Red Cross with a check for $15,000 and announced plans to raise an additional $45,000 by contributing $85 per customer who signs up for high speed internet and phone service packages.

Executive Reardon highlighted the work Snohomish County is doing to expand partnerships between private business, local government and non-profits to improve services to the community.
caregivers

The Aging and Disability Services Division of Snohomish County Human Services will host a presentation on the issues and challenges faced by caregivers.

“The Caregiving Journey” will be presented on Wednesday, March 23.

Caring for a loved one is often described as a journey. There’s a beginning, middle and an end – and along the way, there is the need for services and support changes. Knowing about options along the journey can help the caregiver make the best decisions for themselves and their loved ones.

Learn the five milestones of the journey, the challenges of each one and the best strategies to get through them. Presenter Christina Marneris is the Family Caregiver Support Program Coordinator at Southwest Washington Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities.

The seminar will run from 10:30 a.m. to noon at Compass Health Administrative Office’s Central Conference Room in Building 2, located at 4526 Federal Ave., Everett.

Sponsored by The Everett Clinic and the Snohomish County Council on Aging, the event is free and open to the public.

For more information or to reserve a space, contact Joyce Frasu at 425-788-7377 or j.frasu@snoco.org.

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You may also contact me directly by phone at 425.388.3460.