

Weather coverage floods the air waves

Andrew Beck
Staff Writer

Did any of you try watching television January 24 issue, this Thursday or Friday? Well, chances are that unless you had cable you probably ended up watching too much extended news coverage of widespread Northwest flooding, dubbed the "Great Flood of 1996."

Yet, I got the impression that all this media coverage, or media blitz in this case, over-sensitized the natural disaster our homes were facing. When I refer to media I am mostly referring to local television and radio stations because those are the forms of media our society is most dependent upon.

Except for the Tonya Harding fiasco I have never seen any other local news story that has been intensely watched and researched by the media and the public. The flood itself started like most other natural anomalies do with local reports of school closures and road hazards, but it exaggerated to dangerous extremes. As the water in our rivers went up so did the lengths to which TV stations would go to get stories on them.

Portland car rental companies were out of cars by the end of the weekend as a result of the needs of the media for transpor-

tation to cover the flood. On the television alone, Oregonians went from watching news about about rainfall to watching videos of whole houses being ripped apart by mud flows. I found that as the media blitz of the flood coverage continued, the goal of providing up to date information was less evident. The human need for entertainment became more important than our need of safety.

By Friday night the only stories we saw on TV or heard on the radio were the conditions and incidents of the storm rather than a local map of all the Northwest's flooded areas. TV stations would show video segment after video segment of car crashes, mud slides and mass floodings whose sole purpose was to keep the tube on rather than fill you in on the plight of local families and residents. I knew that the media had lost track of itself when I sat in my chair and watched two guys rowing a boat down the main street of Tillamook for fifteen minutes.

I can't really blame the local media for over-sensationalism without looking at human nature in general; after all, they were just doing their job. Oregonians wanted to see the flooding highlights and dramatic events that took place; we just wanted some entertainment. For every per-

son that was sandbagging along the shores of the Willamette, look at all the people who were watching the rising water and taking pictures of the flooded areas. It got so bad at night the police had to patrol the sides of the local rivers for people who went too close to the flood waters.

When the waters have died down and we finally get a good look at the damage the flood caused, what will we see? The news will be filled with stories of local businesses forever destroyed by the "Flood of 1996" or of people made sick by all the raw sewage in the river...a lot of people will be sick because they went into the flood water to take pictures! What is most important is that we remember the destruction and effects the flood had on us and that safety is more important than creating a media sensation.

I would much rather see positive videos of volunteering Oregon citizens on CNN rather than pictures of flood destruction.

