

Cascadia Day 30: Carry on and prepare for a crowd

Refugees from west side will head to the east

Editor's note: This is the third story in a five-part series about a possible Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake in Oregon and Washington state.

By **JADE McDOWELL**
EO Media Group

Life will go on in Eastern Oregon if the dreaded Cascadia earthquake ever hits the Pacific Northwest, but it will not quickly return to normal.

It's unclear how many refugees from the west side of the state will land in Umatilla County, but Joe Franell, CEO of Eastern Oregon Telecom and chairman of the governor's Oregon Broadband Advisory Council, said if half of the county's 76,700 residents have family on the west side who come to stay with them the county's population could quickly double.

"If you look at what happened with (Hurricane) Katrina, where they landed is where they tended to stay," he said of people fleeing the disaster. "I don't know if we can house that many."

At the same time, some people in Eastern Oregon would join one of the 50 nonprofits on the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters registry and head west to assist in cleanup efforts there. Those with medical training can get pre-credentialed now with the State Emergency Registry of Volunteers to provide medical services.

Commerce

The earthquake could prove crippling to some businesses, especially those that depend on shipping commodities to the west side of the state. But Umatilla County emergency manager Tom Roberts said other local businesses could see a boon from refugees, volunteers, media



The Oregon Office of Emergency Management offers an emergency preparedness scorecard.

and government workers who would likely spend weeks in the county or at least pass through.

"With that increased population expectancy, the potential is if business owners are prepared, and if they've encouraged their employees to be prepared, there is a potential for them to see a windfall," he said.

The Oregon Office of Emergency Management offers an emergency preparedness scorecard that helps businesses assess how resilient they would be in a natural disaster and helps ask the "tough questions" about whether they should reopen.



Joe Franell

Roberts said that if owners and employees are personally prepared for a disaster, then they will be able to return to work more quickly. The business also needs to have plans in place for communication and the possibility they may need to function for a while without electricity or internet (see sidebar).

Customers also need to be prepared for the fact that businesses may not immediately reopen, or may operate on a cash-only basis for a while after the disaster.

Mental health

A month into the disaster there would likely be more stability in meeting physical needs, but mental and emotional needs will also be present.

After Hurricane Katrina



Oregon Office of Emergency Management

flooded New Orleans, the city's residents experienced increased rates of post traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. Cascadia, with its destructive powers and aftershocks that will likely run for weeks, could produce similar effects.

Monique Dugaw, communications director for the Cascades region of the Red Cross, said the nonprofit has volunteer mental health professionals that it would call upon to help victims of Cascadia.

Steve Eberline, a preparedness presenter for Red Cross, said people will be in a better place mentally after a big disaster if they have discussed it, thought about it and prepared for it ahead of time.

"A family plan is part of psychologically preparing for the event," he said. "A lot of people don't want to talk about it, because thinking of your child trapped at school across the river, it's a tough conversation to have."

He said his family keeps card games and books in their 72-hour kit, to provide a "sense of normalcy and comfort" if they had to live in a tent or emergency shelter for a while. The Red Cross also keeps stuffed animals for children in its emergency shelters.

Services

As life begins to stabilize in Eastern Oregon, organizations like school districts will have

to figure out how to carry on in the face of a "new normal."

Mike Kay, operations manager for Hermiston School District, participates in meetings with Umatilla County's local emergency preparedness committee, and said the school district has relocation plans in place to evacuate students in the event of an emergency. It also plans to offer up its buildings and staff as resources to the Red Cross, National Guard and other responders.

"We anticipate we, and any facilities we have, becoming readily available staging areas," he said.

Kay said so far the district has been mostly focused on what would happen in the first month after Cascadia and hasn't spent much time discussing how it would accommodate a large influx of children from the west side.

As the district has built new schools, it has built them up to seismic standards. If the county only sees light shaking during Cascadia and its aftershocks, the damage to school buildings in Hermiston could be very minimal. However, with variables such as time of year unknown, Kay said how soon school would start back up again is "the million dollar question."

Other organizations have similar questions. Roberts said many of them have been

Preparing your business for Cascadia earthquake

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managers.

In the event of a disaster, businesses can get back on their feet more quickly if they are prepared. The Oregon Office of Emergency Management's business preparedness website and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Recover Guide have a comprehensive set of resources for businesses, including the following suggestions:

1) Have an emergency plan and supplies such as flashlights and first aid kits in place for if the disaster hits during the work day. Make sure your employees know what the plan is and where the supplies are.

2) Have a plan for communication between employees and consider purchasing satellite phones or walkie talkies for

3) Seismically safeguard your office or store and secure important inventory.

4) Invest in off-site backup services for your company website and digital records you don't want to lose. Also have paper copies of employee contacts, insurance and other important information on hand.

5) Learn how your suppliers would operate during an emergency so that you can make sure your plans fit with theirs, and identify backup suppliers from out of state if needed.

6) Discuss partnerships to pool resources with other small businesses in the community in the event of a disaster.

7) Once disaster hits, document damage carefully and file insurance claims.

invited to an all-day Cascadia Earthquake Preparedness Summit on in May to discuss "areas to work on" as the region continues to prepare for Cascadia.

"We don't have all the answers yet, but we intend to start working on them this spring," he said.

Coming Thursday: Cascadia after six months.

Bill prohibits employers from firing workers who use marijuana

Employees who show up high could still get fired

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Most Oregon employers would lose the right to fire workers or deny employment to a candidate who uses marijuana during nonwork hours, under a bill proposed by lawmakers on the legislative marijuana regulation committee.

The controversial legislation makes exceptions for certain industries such as truck drivers, federal contractors and jobs covered by collective bargaining agreements.

As a legal substance in the state, marijuana should be treated the same as tobacco, proponents told lawmakers during a public hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee Tuesday.

"The goal with Senate Bill 301 is to protect other substances that are legal under Oregon law from being a cause of termination or not hiring people for a particular job," said Beth Creighton, a Portland employment attorney, who has represented clients who were fired for their marijuana use. "Currently, tobacco is protected, so if you use tobacco off-site, employers are not permitted to fire you because of that. With the onset of legalized marijuana, marijuana should not be treated any differently."

The bill still allows employers to fire employees who come to work impaired, she noted.

"If you have somebody falling down drunk in the workplace, you don't have to keep them on duty. You don't have to keep them as an employee," Creighton said. "You can still



Paris Achen/Capital Bureau

Heather Kell of Portland sits in the Senate Judiciary Committee meeting at the Capitol in Salem Tuesday after testimony on a bill to prohibit employers from firing employees who use marijuana.

be prohibited from coming to work impaired on any kind of substance."

Opponents argued such a law would violate federal law on controlled substances and would be defeated in court.

Employers, including cities and counties, argued the bill also could put employers at risk of litigation.

"I am not generally averse to symbolic laws that can't be enforced. Sometimes you want to make a policy statement even if it's unenforceable," said Rob Bovett, legal counsel for the Association of Oregon Counties.

However, the bill "would cost our members ... significant dollars to litigate and defend, and ultimately, it is my strong opinion, would all be preempted (by federal law)," Bovett said. "In this case, we don't want to see a symbolic law put on the books that would not be

enforceable but would cost taxpayers money."

Opponents said the bill also needs to allow businesses that involve public safety, including airline pilots, railroad engineers and schoolteachers, to prohibit employees from using marijuana on or off work.

Portland resident Heather Kell, who has a bachelor's degree in finance, said she lost a job offer after she disclosed that she was a medical marijuana patient and tested positive for THC, the psychoactive element of marijuana.

"I feel that even though it's legal in the state of Oregon, it's awkward that I have to share private medical information," Kell told lawmakers during the hearing. "I could no longer work with the recruiting agency, and I did not know I would be precluded from all future employment through the recruiting agency."

During the five years since she started using medical marijuana, Kell said she had never been reprimanded or accused of being impaired due to her medical marijuana use.

One way to protect medical marijuana users, without putting the state in conflict with federal law, could be to change Oregon's Disabilities Act to prohibit discrimination against medical marijuana users who use the substance when they're not at work, said Jim Westwood, senior counsel at Stoel Rives, who spoke on behalf of Oregon businesses.

State Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said he plans to meet with Westwood, other opponents and proponents to discuss that potential option.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

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