

# GREAT COASTAL GALE OF 2007

TEN-YEAR ANNIVERSARY // DECEMBER 2017

## STORM BROUGHT NEIGHBORS, COMMUNITIES TOGETHER



Water from Plympton Creek rushes under a railroad trestle Dec. 3, 2007 near the Westport Fire Department.

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

### Coast cut off from rest of world for nearly a week

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Daily Astorian*

Rosemary Johnson felt strange admitting it, but she was having fun. She had never seen Astoria from the air, and, now on a December day in 2007, the city planner was up in a Coast Guard helicopter seeing the city as she had never seen it before.

But she was only in the helicopter because hurricane-force winds had just pummeled coastal Oregon and Washington, knocking out power for days, felling trees, shutting down highways and inflicting severe damage on many homes and buildings.

Johnson had worked nonstop for days with other city employees and an army of volunteers to document the damage from the ground, creating a record to back insurance claims and secure emergency funding. Now she needed to get a bird's eye view of the challenge ahead of her.

From the ground, she knew the damage was bad. From the air, she saw exactly how the wind had carved up the city. It looked like a giant had raised its hand and raked its fingers across Astoria.

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### Guarding against another gale

#### Improvements ready county for next storm

By JACK HEFFERNAN  
*The Daily Astorian*

As wind howled and rain pounded the pavement in December 2007, Clatsop County's entire emergency management department huddled inside a parked car to catch some sleep.

The task wasn't too difficult — the department consisted of just one part-time employee.

Gene Strong, a retired Wahkiakum County sheriff, was the county's emergency services coordinator. For five days, he and other North Coast residents were cut off from the rest of the world. He stayed at the sheriff's office in Astoria to coordinate response efforts and try — often in vain — to request help from the state.

Trees littered the roadways. Communication channels went down. Two people died and thousands lacked vital resources for days. County staff scrambled to react.

Things slowly began to normalize after about a week. But as the skies became clearer, so too did the need for emergency officials to learn from the experience and

make some fundamental changes.

In the decade since the Great Coastal Gale, hazardous trees have been removed, communications systems hardened and emergency management operations reformed and expanded. Residents also appear to have better prepared themselves for another major weather disruption.

While some concerns persist and others are impossible to fully plan for, officials are more confident about their readiness.

"I think we're better prepared," said Strong, who is now retired. "It doesn't happen by accident. Their success is because they plan and they're prepared."

#### Highways impassable

Life was miserable for many during the gale. Stranded and displaced residents had to deal with shortages of critical resources such as food, fuel and medical supplies.

Both Strong and County Emergency Manager Tiffany Brown narrow the many issues down to two factors: communication and transportation. In fact, out of the 18 emergency support functions outlined in the county's emergency operations plan, transportation and communication appear first and second.

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