

# Response: The hovercraft can reach 78% of the world's coastlines

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The Clatsop County Office of Emergency Management coordinated the event with the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and state Military Department.

"The landing exercise was twofold," said Tiffany Brown, the county's emergency manager. "The first reason was to help us better understand the challenges and interface that will occur with the Navy if they show up to help us after a Cascadia earthquake and tsunami. The second part of it was for them to start establishing which beaches are suitable for landing."

A large earthquake will likely cause large-scale damage to the region's roadways. Air and sea have become the more likely routes of delivering supplies afterward. That idea crystallized during the Cascadia Rising emergency preparedness exercise in 2016, Brown said.

In 2017, the Navy's Third Fleet, on its way to Seafair in Seattle, practiced landing supplies from an amphibious landing craft at South Beach Marina in Newport.

A recent assessment found several spots in the county for landing, including Gower Street in Cannon Beach, the Promenade in Seaside, 10th Street in Gearhart and Sunset Beach, chosen for Monday's exercise.

The propellers of the Navy's air-cushioned landing craft kicked up sand and water on Sunset Beach as hundreds of onlookers watched them hover in, deflate, drop off heavy vehicles, inflate and hover back out to sea atop the surf.

"We can land pretty much anything," said Lt. Cmdr. Christopher McCurry, an executive officer aboard the USS Anchorage, a 634-foot amphibious landing dock where two hovercraft are stowed.

The hovercraft can reach 78% of the world's coastlines with far more mobility than World War II-era craft, McCurry said. While the Anchorage, commissioned in 2011, has yet to respond to a natural disaster, other readiness groups supported responses to Hurricane Katrina, the Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

Ships like the Anchorage can get underway within 96 hours after local authorities ask for federal assistance. "We might be able to get on faster depending on what we're bringing," McCurry said.

The Anchorage can carry water purification systems, water tanks, mobile hospitals and medical personnel. Teams from the ship can set up field hospitals or take people onboard for treatment. Aircraft aboard can perform search and rescue operations.



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Crew members on the USS Anchorage prepare landing craft for departure during the training exercise.



Guests disembark a landing craft after taking a tour of the USS Anchorage staged offshore.

While the Navy landed supplies from hovercraft on the beach, the 173rd Fighter Wing in Klamath Falls flew them into the airport. Two cargo planes — one from

Japan and another from Little Rock, Arkansas — took turns landing at the local airport, unloading Humvees, reloading and taking off.

Senior Master Sgt. Jennifer Shirar, a spokeswoman for the 173rd, said the unit is used to flying fighter planes and wanted to practice staging cargo planes to provide relief.

"If the Cascadia event were to occur, Klamath Falls should not be as affected as our coastal regions," she said. "We wanted to see if we could be a staging area."

"We're all Oregonians, and if something like this were to happen, we would be responding."

Before the Cascadia Rising exercise, many senior leaders from across the country had no idea about the dangers the region faces, Brown said.

"No one was aware of it," she said. "They were aware of the New Madrid Fault, because most of them were on the East Coast," she said of the seismic zone in the South and Midwest. "That regional exercise was a real shot in the arm for us as a region, for the rest of the country to have a better understanding of what the impacts of this event are going to look like."



Military vehicles offload from a landing craft at Sunset Beach during the training exercise.

## Commission: 'We need to do everything we can to make sure that this is a confidential process'

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"This is for employees to give confidential feedback on their day-to-day operations," Spence said. "It's a number of questions (about) their workplace, the relationships, and it is kept confidential with the employee so they can give an unfettered opinion of their work environment."

Whether the survey results could be kept confidential was a sticking point for Stevens. The retired Coast Guard captain said his experience with such surveys in the military made him worried the results, like the comments by McGrath, would not remain confidential and could be disclosed to the media or others outside the Port.

"It's real hard to keep it confidential," he said. "Of course people talk to one another. And there is always a chance for people who have a long-sought-after vendetta after their supervisor or after their boss will also come to light."

Eileen Eakins, the Port's attorney, said a survey of employees is part of the Port Commission's ability to evaluate the executive director. She would work with a consultant and Spence to develop the

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Frank Spence | president of Port Commission

survey.

"We need to do everything we can to make sure that this is a confidential process," she said. "And for those who are inclined to share it with The Daily Astorian, or state legislators or anyone else that they feel necessary to see it, the way to make sure that doesn't happen is to not distribute a paper copy."

The survey results should be discussed privately in executive session, after which the Port Commission can decide how to use the results in their evaluation of Knight, she said.

"At some point, the commission may decide they want to disclose it, but that's going to be your call," Eakins said. "If it's in my possession, I cannot disclose it unless it's subpoenaed by a court."

The Port denied a public records request by The Astorian for McGrath's letter and comments, which by that point had gone to Port commissioners, state agencies and legislators. The Clatsop County District Attorney's Office later ordered the documents released after a closed session allowing Knight to respond to McGrath's allegations.

Knight has since deferred his response until July, Spence said. The newspaper obtained copies of McGrath's observations from a confidential source.

Stevens claimed the process of reviewing Knight's performance had been corrupted by the disclosure of McGrath's observations. Rohne claimed the review has nothing to do with the disclosure, which Stevens disputed.

## Port: Staff estimates the crumbling Pier 2 will need several million dollars in repairs

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The Port needs an updated plan to seek help from the state to address more than \$20 million in maintenance on crumbling docks. The Port still has nearly \$16 million in outstanding loans with the state's Infrastructure Finance Authority for past improvements, part of the reason McArthur said the agency needs to assure the state it will make a plan and follow through.

"This is not the end-all," she said. "The end-all is you guys making sure whatever becomes your strategic business plan, you follow it. You follow it to the letter. You document what you're doing. You demonstrate to the public that you're doing what you said you would do."

McArthur's draft details the need to repair the Port's central waterfront, starting with the crumbling Pier 2, where seafood processors in the agency's warehouse take in catch and employ hundreds of workers.

Port staff estimate the pier, pockmarked with metal sheets and quick fixes to the deck, needs several million dollars in repairs. The Port recently hired an engineering firm to investigate a solution to sinking on the west side. State engineers

recently recommended closure of the east side because of a rotting substructure.

Many of the recommendations in McArthur's plan came from an ad-hoc committee of financial and economic development professionals convened to help the Port save and make more money. The committee presented its final recommendations before McArthur, along with the Port's Airport Advisory Committee.

The finance committee called for a more proactive financial approach and better tracking of the costs of maintenance and depreciation of Port assets in leases to tenants. The committee recommended more staff involvement in reporting to the commission and more outside scrutiny of the Port.

The most immediate recommendations center around selling underperforming assets — likely buildings, but not land — to provide immediate money to address deferred maintenance.

McArthur and the finance committee recommended creating a process for assessing the viability of properties before selling any. The Port recently hired an appraiser to review the Astoria Riverwalk Inn, Chinook Building and former Seafare Restaurant surrounding the

West Mooring Basin for a likely sale.

Near the end of her presentation, McArthur reiterated that the Port's near-term plan needs to focus on requalifying for state funding, addressing aging infrastructure and regaining public trust to make a case for significant public investment.

"If you get this foundational work done, then you can go back to saying, 'Our focus needs to be on the economic development component of our mission,'" she said. "You're not going to get there without doing these other things first."

The state Department of Transportation recently paused its ConnectOregon infrastructure grant program to focus on several multimodal hubs around the state.

Dave Harlan, a former Port employee and now ports manager for Business Oregon, told the Port Commission there will likely be a substantial round of ConnectOregon funding in the near future.

"I just hope that you've got a strategic plan in place, because I think it's going to be a requirement to apply," he said. "And I think there's an opportunity to bring in some significant dollars for Pier 2, and at least take off one of your top priorities."