

OPINION

the Astorian

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

‘You are the help until help arrives’

As we move into the storm season, my mind always goes back to the Great Coastal Gale of 2007.

It was a Sunday night and “Desperate Housewives” was on. I was in middle school. Ironically, a storm was happening in their fictitious world too, only ours really did take out the power — for nearly a week. While that storm was horrific in its destruction — winds toppled decades-old trees, power lines littered roadways in addition to a lack of food and gas — a Cascadia Subduction Zone event will be different.

Many are already keenly aware of what it is — a devastating event that could happen in the next 50 years beginning with a building-shaking earthquake followed by tsunami waves dozens of feet high carrying debris from the earthquake. It is estimated most will have around 15 to 20 minutes to reach higher ground. Rebuilding from it could take years.

As Kathryn Schulz writes of the Pacific Northwest in her Pulitzer Prize-winning feature, “The Really Big One” in The New Yorker: “When the next full-margin rupture happens, that region will suffer the worst natural disaster in the history of North America, outside of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, which killed upward of a hundred thousand people.” Schulz goes on to write how most in the region are sadly not prepared for this event.

Unsettled? Me, too. As a graduate student, I remember sitting in a class with colleagues nearly 2,500 miles from the Oregon Coast hearing others talk about the Cascadia event in awe — only to feel a lump in my stomach as I worried about my family. I grew up on the North Coast. My parents and grandparents have lived here for over 50 years. They built their lives and business here. It is chilling to imagine all of the coast’s beautiful land-scaped ravaged.

So, I decided, enough. Instead of just knowing about this disaster that is likely to occur, I wanted to find out what can be done to prepare. After the heat wave in June, the ice storm in February and the smoke from the wildfires last fall, it has become painfully clear the future won’t be full of less disasters, as scientists predict more are likely to occur.

On Tuesday, I attended a talk given by geologist and Seaside City Councilor Tom Horning on the Cascadia event. Held in a conference room at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center, the event was packed. Nearly 100 people



A map for tsunami evacuation stands on the Astoria Riverwalk next to the Columbia River.

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

PREPARING FOR A DISASTER

Finding a Community Emergency Response Team:

<https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/cert-find-a-program>

Download tsunami maps: <https://www.co.clatsop.or.us/em/page/tsunami>

Clatsop County Tsunami Evacuation Facilities Improvement Plan:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/90bd871c0b984496902d0339247565e2>

Great Oregon ShakeOut: <https://www.shakeout.org/oregon/howtoparticipate/>

ShakeAlert: <https://www.oregon.gov/oem/hazardsprep/pages/orshakealert.aspx>

Reading tsunami signs: https://www.discoverourcoast.com/our-coast-magazine/live-stay/tsunami-signs-know-where-to-go/article_23ec0bee-6c98-11ea-9637-dfa9e7f77840.html

showed up. You could see and feel the audience’s collective shifting in their chairs when particularly uncomfortable, sobering facts were presented. While I also left feeling uneasy, I did feel empowered by what I’d learned.

Horning’s talk was not only informative, but moving in getting people to see what they can do before the big one hits. As Su Coddington, the leader of the Seaside Community Emergency Response Team, put it: “You are the help until help arrives.”

While there are only a few minutes to head toward safety when Cascadia happens, people should also be prepared to wait for weeks for help to arrive. If it were to happen, the electrical grid would go down almost instantly. Roads would be unnavigable. And it would impact

large cities far from the coast like Portland, Eugene, Salem and Seattle.

So, while all of this is terrifying, what can you do to prepare now? Pack a go-kit. The American Red Cross recommends including: “a gallon of water per person, per day, nonperishable food, a flashlight, battery-powered radio, first aid kit, medications, supplies for infants or pets, a multipurpose tool, personal hygiene items, copies of important papers, cellphone chargers, blankets, maps of the area and emergency contact information.”

They recommend creating a plan for an emergency: What will you do if your family is separated? What about your pets? The Red Cross also encourages people to stay informed of your local areas’ plans during an emergency.

I’d also recommend taking the time now to begin digitizing important documents and special mementos, like family photos.

With the pandemic bearing down on our lives for nearly two years, it can feel almost insurmountable to try to prepare for one more thing. But this one is different. Pack a go-kit, know your tsunami evacuation route, participate in the Great Oregon ShakeOut on Thursday, attend a meeting of the Clatsop County Tsunami Evacuation Facilities Improvement Plan, join or attend meetings for your area’s Community Emergency Response Team, help your neighbors prepare, ask questions of your locally elected officials and sign up for ShakeAlert in Oregon.

As The New Yorker magazine writer Ed Caesar, in describing the ensuing disaster if an old supertanker docked off the coast of Yemen filled with oil were to explode, writes, “Journalists often cover disasters after they happen. We rarely tell the stories of disasters that have yet to occur, but are so plainly and chillingly foreseeable.”

While Yemen is a world away from the North Coast, we too have our own looming disaster that ticks away beneath the sea. Let’s help each other prepare now and not wish we had done so sooner.

Jonathan Williams is the associate editor of The Astorian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Needless noise

The Fort George Brewery steam whistle, which blows at 5 p.m. weekdays, disturbs a densely populated area inhabited by many seniors and disabled people.

The whistle blows so loudly it is physically painful. I learned to wait first with ear plugs, then added shooters’ ear muffs over those, but could still hear it. Like many here, I have experienced resulting anxiety and tinnitus.

I feel this needless noise is also unkind to others, including autistic and otherwise sensitive visitors caught off guard, those maintaining sobriety in spite of the daily taunt, and those working long past 5 p.m. We just want peace on Duane Street.

J GRIFFIS
Astoria

The big lie

It was my understanding that someone who continues to deny empirical reality was very likely exhibiting signs of emotional decline or mental illness.

When will the American Psychiatric Association declare that this is not “opinion” but, in fact, this is not normal?

DONNA LEE ROLLINS
Astoria

COVID ignorance

About the Warrenton Fire Department problems: The Warrenton mayor, and now a city commissioner, are still trying to figure it out.

COVID-19 is killing thousands in our country, and perhaps thousands in our state. Fortunately medical science has given humanity protection from its ravages.

It’s not perfect, but it’s close, and it’s



all we have to survive. Without it, most of us would eventually succumb to its deadly action ... i.e. die.

I am having a really hard time trying to understand the ambivalence of these two Warrenton leaders on the firehouse vaccination problem. One sort of assumes that highly placed elected officials would not

be ignorant of the science that is involved in protecting humanity from this virus. Is such an assumption in error?

In addition to that problem, Commissioner Rick Newton seems relieved that the firemen and their vehicles are totally protected from this virus; that the protection they enjoy is the solution to the overall

problem of infecting others.

When the firemen-medical aides get home from a days work, and take off their protective gear, then pull out their shopping list and proceed to the grocery store — then what?

DAVID TENNANT
Astoria