

Second-annual 'World Tsunami Preparedness Day' is today

SALEM — Much attention has recently been focused on preparing for a high-magnitude Cascadia earthquake.

But tsunamis are a significant after-effect of high-magnitude quakes. Although they are rare, tsunamis can be extremely deadly. In December 2015, the United Nations General Assembly Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) designated Nov. 5 as World Tsunami Awareness Day.

This year marks the first observance in the U.S., and around the globe. The 2016 theme is "Effective Education and Evacuation Drills."

According to UNISDR, more than 260,000 people have perished in 58 separate tsunamis in the past 100 years. At an average of 4,600 deaths per disaster, the toll has sur-

passed any other natural hazard.

Karen Parmelee, geohazards awareness coordinator at Oregon's Office of Emergency Management, says there are two types of tsunamis and urges people to know the difference. Distant tsunamis, caused by a large undersea earthquake, comes from across the ocean and will take a few hours to come ashore, leaving time for an official warning and evacuation if necessary.

In contrast, local tsunamis come ashore within 10 to 20 minutes after a nearby offshore earthquake. People near the ocean should head to high ground as quickly as possible as the only warning will be the ground shaking.

"People on open beaches, in low-lying areas, near bays or

tidal flats, and near river mouths that drain into the ocean may have little time after a large earthquake to move to high ground," said Parmelee. "Knowing what to do and where to go can save lives. Know local evacuation routes and assembly areas in coastal areas," she said.

The Oregon Office of Emergency Management has several resources to help educate the public about tsunami safety:

- **Tsunami Safe: "Hospitality Begins with Safety"** is a free program aimed at the hospitality industry. Hoteliers, motel owners and staff, bed and breakfast hosts, and people offering Airbnb, are all invited to attend.

Classes are offered Nov. 1-8. An online schedule is available at www.tsunamisafe.info.

- **"Know Before You Go"** is an OEM public information effort that encourages people to know the difference between a tsunami warning, advisory and

watch, and provides evacuation maps and other resources for individuals and families.

- **The Tsunami Blue Line** is an OEM wayfinding project implemented in Florence, Coos Bay, Reedsport and Gold Beach, aids coastal residents and visitors in finding a route outside the tsunami inundation zone and to safety.
- **"Without Warning: Tsunami,"** the newest collaboration between OEM and Dark Horse Comics, helps to educate youth and others about what to do when an earthquake and tsunami strike.

In addition, Oregon's coast highway will soon have seven times as many distinctive blue and white tsunami signs.

The "Leaving Tsunami Hazard Zone" and "Entering Tsunami Hazard Zone" signs along Highway 101 are one of Oregon's most visible tsunami awareness efforts. But the original signs installed in the 1990s are now in the wrong place, because new coast-wide tsu-

mi modeling better captures where tsunami waves could reach.

More importantly, says Jonathan Allan, Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) coastal geomorphologist, original signs were installed in just a few locations.

"Signs were initially being installed community-by-community because at the time, funding for modeling tsunamis focused on individual communities," Allan said. "It would have taken 18 years to complete the entire coast. But with the 2013 completion of coast-wide tsunami modelling, we are now in a position to establish new signs all along Highway 101 and relocate existing signs to their correct location."

DOGAMI and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) are working on the sign expansion project, which will increase the number of signs from 36 to more than 260.

ODOT has already installed new signs in the communities of Warrenton and Astoria, and with remaining signs for Clatsop and Tillamook County expected to be installed by spring 2017.

Signs for the remainder of the coast highway system are expected to be installed by summer 2018. The project was funded by the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program (NTHMP) with the cost to install the signs funded by ODOT.

The project is the latest in ongoing efforts by state agen-

cies and coastal cities to help people find their way to high ground.

The innovative Tsunami Blue Line project, also funded by the NTHMP, added a distinctive blue line and markers to identify evacuation routes in Florence, Reedsport, Coos Bay and Gold Beach.

"A tsunami will arrive within minutes, so knowing where high ground is and how to get there can save your life," said Althea Rizzo, Geologic Hazards Coordinator for the Oregon Office of Emergency Management. "Practicing routes to safety is an essential part of preparedness."

Signs and other wayfinding enhancements give evacuation routes greater visibility.

The interactive evacuation map viewer at OregonTsunami.org lets coastal residents and visitors enter an address to see the nearest high ground, which they can then use to plan and practice their routes.

Additional Oregon tsunami preparedness and mitigation projects funded by NTHMP for 2016-18 include developing a web tool that lets people print a custom evacuation map, adding tsunami wayfinding signs in three more coastal communities, and support for community evacuation drills.

Total funding received was \$445,603.

World Tsunami Awareness Day also encourages learning and practicing evacuation routes.

For more information about tsunami safety, visit www.tsunamizone.org.



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