

PREP from page 1A

The Siuslaw School District, for example, had been planning for the past two months for an outbreak, including stocking up on fuel and creating plans to get food out to the community. But as School Board President Guy Rosinbaum said, there was little organization with the rest of the community.

“There doesn’t seem to be a lot of coordinated effort in making sure these agencies are talking to one another at the moment, besides us,” Rosinbaum said during a special school board meeting on Wednesday, March 18.

While the district’s preparations have been used as an example for other districts across the state, the mandate of the school can only carry them so far.

“We’re trying to make them understand we’re here to support them and their children while they keep this community functional, as well as whatever else we can do to help with that,” Rosinbaum said.

While the school district

has staff ready to volunteer in multiple capacities, they are still limited in what they can and cannot do.

Other agencies have made progress as well. Lane County has declared a state of emergency to allow funding, and the City of Florence will most likely follow suit in a special meeting Monday, March 23, at Florence City Hall. The Siuslaw Library District has been disseminating COVID-19 fact sheets to the public and has offered its services as researchers to any organization in the community.

“The library has done a great job of getting information on their website,” Schick said. “The food banks and Siuslaw Outreach Services (SOS) are great. Working with the police department and dispatch has been great too.”

It’s a sentiment shared by Siuslaw School Board Vice President John Barnett.

“Overall, our community in general has been outstanding through this,” he said on Wednesday. “Our leadership roles [referring to Florence Police Chief Tom Turner, Peace Harbor COO Jason Hawkins and Siuslaw School

District Superintendent Andrew Grzeskowiak] have been nothing short of amazing.”

Residents have begun creating groups to help in various capacities, and businesses have stepped up to feed the community.

Still, the general consensus — and largest hurdle — has been an overall lack of organization and cohesive leadership.

“I think we do need to get some leadership going,” Schick said.

That is something he believes will be figured out as soon as Friday, March 20, as the city, fire and school districts meet together.

“One of the topics is to look at what the incident command structure looks like,” Schick said. “Is there going to be an incident commander? Is this going to be staffing eight hours a day, 24 hours a day? Who’s going to handle public information officer duties? We absolutely need to get these answers out to the public.”

Soon after the meeting, the group, along with other organizations in the community, need to solidify and enact plans immediately, Schick said.

Two organizations that would have normally acted as leadership in an emergency is Lane County and the Western Lane Emergency Operations Group (WLEOG), but both of those organizations have their limitations.

Over the past number of years, WLEOG had a reputation for being prepared, often quoting the United States Coast Guard motto of “Semper Paratus” — the definition of always prepared. But the detailed plans that WLEOG created were for natural disasters such as tsunamis, winter storms and earthquakes. Ultimately, the plans were designed around an event that would leave other towns intact.

“If you look at a tsunami, is that going to impact Eugene? Probably not. And so, we can rely on Eugene,” Schick explained. “With the coronavirus, it’s unique in that not only will it impact Florence, but it’s impacting the entire world.”

Areas thought to be spared from natural disasters that could have helped the Siuslaw region are now under the same threat and are dealing with the same issues.

“In our emergency operations plan, we don’t have a chapter on an infectious disease outbreak,” Schick said. “I would say most communities didn’t have that because it was so rare for something like that to happen.”

The region could lean on Lane County for help, but

that also has its limitations. While he praised the work of the county, Schick said their resources will only go so far.

“I’m pretty impressed with what the county is doing,” he said, pointing out that the public health officials with the county have been instrumental in getting personal protective equipment (PPE) for WLAD and SVFR.

“But I don’t know how much longer we can rely on their help,” he said. “At some point, the country is going to get overwhelmed. Eugene-Springfield is just going to absorb all their resources, so I think we need to be prepared. We’re going to have to provide for our citizens.”

Ultimately, the Siuslaw region will be on its own and will have to rely on its own resources to pull through — and the time in preparing for that inevitability is running short.

While Jim McGovern, MD, PeaceHealth Oregon Network Vice President of Medical Affairs told the *Siuslaw News* last week that COVID-19 is “likely” in the Florence community, Schick pointed out that it is most likely limited at this moment.

“Right now, you walk around town, everybody’s feeling good, it hasn’t hit us yet,” said Schick. “If you watch the infections in the state of Oregon, it’s slowly moving down the I-5 corridor, which you’d expect.”

However, with spring break approaching, COVID-19 could reach the region in days. A popular vacation destination, the Siuslaw region could see visitors coming from around the West Coast looking to escape the stress of the pandemic, as has been seen on Florida beaches in the past week. And as tourists arrive, so too could more cases of COVID-19.

“I’m hoping that spring break is very quiet here,” Schick said. “I know that hits our businesses pretty hard, but I think they’re already hit hard. I think the feds and state are working to help ease that burden on our businesses, but I’m hoping for a very quiet spring break, and the beaches are empty. But that remains to be seen.”

If COVID-19 were to appear aggressively in the region without preparations and precautions, the possibility of a higher fatality rate could increase exponentially.

“Worst case scenario, the fatality rate could be anywhere from a couple percent to five or six percent,” Schick said.

Before joining the fire service, Schick was a research scientist working on synthetic blood. He completed his thesis on biological warfare situations in small communities.

When asked what a death rate in the region would look like, he said the possibilities varied on response.

The Siuslaw Vision estimates the Siuslaw Region to have 18,000 residents. A 6-percent death rate could claim the lives of 1,080 people. In a worst-case scenario, that would mean at least 540 dead in Florence (pop. 8,947), 82 dead in Dunes City (pop. 1,375), 58 dead in Mapleton (pop. 963), and hundreds more in other areas, such as Collard Lake, Swisshome and Deadwood.

Those numbers are what Rosinbaum referred to as a “surrealistic nightmare” that keeps him awake at night.

“There’s no herd immunity,” he said. “The only way to get there is either by a vaccination for the disease, which we don’t have, or getting the disease itself — which our most vulnerable in town can’t do. It’s not an option.”

To prevent the highest number of deaths, the entire Siuslaw community must practice precautions such as “social distancing, which is a fantastic idea,” Schick said. “Staying six feet apart or more.”

Schick also recommended cancelling all in-person meetings and, instead, relying on teleconferencing.

“And washing your hands constantly,” he added. “Disinfect doorknobs. If you’re sick, stay at home. Throw away Kleenexes right away, cough into your elbow. Make sure that you’re not exposing people.”

And be aware that the majority of COVID-19 spread in other countries has come through people that did not know they carried the coronavirus — because they were not exhibiting systems.

“One of the problems with the coronavirus is, you may be infectious for a little while before symptoms start up,” Schick said.

Even with all that to think about, he also cautioned the community against panic and hoarding.

“Stop hoarding toilet paper,” he said first. “I don’t think you need to wear a mask unless you have symptoms, I would leave those to the first responders because we’re running out of masks. We’re running out of supplies.”

Social distancing then becomes a responsibility for every Siuslaw resident, regardless of age, as City of Florence Mayor Joe Henry stated in a letter to the community earlier this week:

“We urge our community members to adhere to the social distancing measures being implemented by the State of Oregon and the Centers of Disease Control. These measures mean we may need to postpone our important events, such as weddings, celebrations of life and other events of gathering. It is our

shared responsibility to protect each other and our most vulnerable populations. I understand that making these hard decisions is difficult and often disappointing. If we do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19, those events will be more meaningful.”

Henry also cautioned residents from discrimination.

“We cannot combat COVID-19 if we turn on each other or stigmatize people who test positive and become ill,” he wrote. “That only puts sick people and the broader community at-risk because it discourages people from getting tested, getting care and staying home. We are afraid of the unknown and how this virus will end up impacting our lives. It is our job to remain kind and supportive during these uncertain times.”

For social distancing and self-quarantine to work, the community needs to have an organized response to help in the event of an order to shelter in-place.

“If we’re going to be sheltering in place, which I wouldn’t be surprised if that’s coming down here really shortly ... how do you meet the basic needs of your citizens if they’re staying at home? How can they contact us or the proper people in the community so we can make sure they get help?” Schick asked. “I think those are some of the other questions we need to find answers to.”

And after the sheltering ends, what then?

“Are they going to have to stay in their home for months and months?” Schick asked. “Is it just a couple weeks? When they come out, do you then have new exposures? Right now, nobody knows.”

But to ensure that those who do stay in place can survive, the community needs to start taking concrete actions now.

“I think we’re not prepared as we should be,” Schick said. “I was hoping we had more time to do that, but I think we’re absolutely starting along that path. I think we have to ramp up very quickly.”

Ultimately, community members will have to remain calm, ready and determined to work together. This will include all organizations and volunteer groups, from city governments to WLAD, SVFR, the school district, the library district, nonprofits such as Siuslaw Outreach Services, Helping Hands and local food shares.

“I’m so impressed with this community and how they’re willing to help each other,” Schick said. “We need to take advantage of that and get everybody working together. It’s not a lack of people wanting to help, which is a good thing. It’s just coordinating those efforts. I’m cautiously optimistic that we’re going to get things going in the right direction really quick.”

HAVE FUN! BEACH SAFE!

BEWARE THE SNEAKER WAVE

They’re called sneaker waves because they appear without warning, often surging high up on the beach with deadly force, and are impossible to predict. Sneaker waves also carry a large amount of sand that can saturate your clothes, weighing you down and making escape difficult if not impossible.

How to play it safe: Never turn your back on the ocean.

WATCH THOSE LOGS

The ocean is strong enough to pick up even the biggest log and plop it down on top of you. Some logs may look small, but even the tiny ones can be waterlogged and weigh tons.

How to play it safe: If you see a log in the surf or on wet sand, stay off it.

RIP CURRENTS

Rip currents are strong currents of water that rush out to sea. They are stronger than even the best swimmer. These currents can swiftly sweep unwary beachcombers and waders off their feet and out to sea. Rip currents may appear as dark, choppy water. Any time you see debris and foam floating out to sea, chances are you have found a rip current. Avoid the area.

How to play it safe: Parents keep your kids close when playing in the ocean. If caught in a rip current, **don’t panic**. Swim parallel to the beach until you are out of the current, then head for the beach.

KNOW THE TIDES

Incoming tides isolate rocks from headlands and the shore. Avoid the temptation of strolling out to an interesting rock without knowing when the tide rolls back in. Free tide tables are readily available at state park offices, information centers and many shops and motels.

How to play it safe: Stay off rocks and small, enclosed beaches.

Know when the tide is coming in by [visiting the tidetable website](http://www.hatfieldmarine.com/tides/tides.html) at the Hatfield Marine Science Center <http://www.weather.hmsc.oregonstate.edu/weather/tides/tides.html>

HIGH WAVES CAN REACH YOU

Tides and waves can sweep over rocks, jetties and headlands, knocking you off and carrying you out to sea.

How to play it safe: Assume nothing is “high enough” and avoid exposed rocks, jetties and headlands during strong wave action (like during and after storms).

BEWARE OF HIGH, STEEP CLIFFS

Assume that all cliff edges are unstable. Wet trails or soft sand and earth can make for unstable footing. Rocks can be slippery even when it isn’t raining.

How to play it safe: Make sure you wear proper footwear, and stick to the trails. Stay behind guard fences and railings, and don’t get too close to the edge.

HEADS UP

Standing at the base of an Oceanside cliff can be dangerous, especially if it has an overhang. In some places, winter storms and high waves have eroded the shoreline, increasing the chance of collapse and slides.

How to play it safe: Beware of falling rocks, and don’t climb on bluffs and eroding hillsides. Don’t walk along the base of cliffs unless absolutely necessary.

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240 HOURS

Is your family prepared?

If an emergency happens in your community, it may take emergency workers some time to reach you. You should be prepared to take care of yourself and your family for a minimum of 240 hours.

Get your emergency first aid kit started with these essentials:

- First aid manual
- Aspirin or pain relievers
- Laxatives, diarrhea medicine
- Rubbing alcohol, petroleum jelly
- Soap, salt, baking soda
- Sanitary napkins, matches
- Triangular bandages
- Elastic bandages, pressure dressings
- Cotton balls, disposable diapers
- Scissors, needles, tweezers
- Popsicle sticks, splints, heavy string
- Thermometer, paper tape
- Syrup of Ipecac
- Personal prescription medications

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