

Cannon Beach takes 'community approach' to emergency planning

By Dani Palmer
Cannon Beach Gazette

When an emergency hits, the city of Cannon Beach intends to be ready, and it wants the community to play a part.

During a City Council work session Tuesday, Aug. 11, Emergency Management Consultant Stacy Burr gave a presentation on the community emergency asset program, which aims to coordinate community resources to protect lives and property following a disaster.

After stocking up on food and water at its three emergency cache sites for three years, Cannon Beach currently has enough to support about 1,500 people short-term, Public Works Director Dan Grassick said. Money is in the general budget to replace those items when needed.

The city also encourages residents to prepare go-bags, filled with items such as food and water to last at least 24 hours after a disaster, and offers barrels for residents to purchase and store supplies in. About 100 are currently in use.

"That program remains intact and we hope to expand it," City Manager Brant Kucera said.

He said the city needs to establish a "more robust framework" for dealing with potential emergencies.

During an Emergency Preparedness Committee meeting in July, Mayor Sam Steidel said staff need to work on helping "people stay alive" for longer than a few days.

Assessing needs

The community emergency asset program is based on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's "whole community approach" in which residents, emergency managers, community leaders and government officials work together to assess needs and determine how to best strengthen assets, Burr said.

Those assets include food, water, medical resources, transportation, continuity of government assets and more.

Cannon Beach budgeted nearly \$40,000 for hooking up water and power services to the cache container and assembly sites this fiscal year.

Burr said the city needs to take more preparatory measures to build disaster-resistant and resilient resources, be collaborative with community organizations and be coordinated to provide effective response and recovery.

"A more sophisticated understanding of a community's needs and capabilities also leads to a more efficient use of existing resources," she said.

The program's goals include developing continuity of operations and a government plan, and an emergency operations plan that reflects the whole community approach at each of the cache sites.

So who is in charge?

Kucera is listed as the emergency manager under the city manager job description, but Emergency Preparedness Committee Chairwoman Karolyn Adamson said the city needs to address the fact many staff, including Kucera, don't live in the city.

She added that residents may find themselves at a cache site without an authority figure. The discovery of guns in personal emergency barrels has already raised safety concerns.

"Unless we can schedule emergencies between 8 and 5, we need to have an incident commander who lives in Cannon Beach," Councilor Mike Benefield said.

Burr noted someone at the city level, perhaps the fire chief or public works director, could serve as that leader.

"It doesn't mean the community isn't a critical part of the conversation," she added.

It's just that the city is obligated to provide services while a community member may decide to ignore an older population, for example, in order to provide more food to a younger one.

Burr said staff are aiming to have those draft emergency operation plans ready to go by February.



Stacy Burr

In an emergency, look for the yellow signs



Signs at Chapman Beach.

State wants quicker emergency responses

By Dani Palmer
Cannon Beach Gazette

A new, bright yellow sign stands in front of homes on Chapman Beach. The sign is part of an Oregon Parks and Recreation Department beach safety project, meant to speed emergency response. The signs are new to Sgt. Matt Phillips, Search and Rescue coordinator for the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office.

But he's no stranger to the guessing game.

"I do know from experience that people, especially from out of the area, have a hard time relaying information to responders," Phillips said.

The state's Park and Recreation Department began installing the signs at

state, federal and county beach access points from the Columbia River jetty to Crissey Field at the California border in 2008. The first was placed in Lincoln City and Devil's Lake. The signs are designed to be easily seen by beachgoers in emergencies, so they can relay the number to 911 dispatchers who will have the GPS coordinates needed to direct first responders.

Signs like the Chapman Point 13 should give people a better idea of where they are, he added, and emergency responders, including the U.S.

warning visitors of hazards such as rip currents and sneaker waves at beach access points. They also list prohibited activities such as littering and fireworks.

"Unfortunately, accidents happen on the beach. Rolling logs, rip tides and unstable cliffs are all potentially dangerous," said Calum Stevenson, Oregon Parks ocean shore specialist. "Our goal was to clearly convey information that will keep visitors safe, like staying back from cliff edges and staying off logs. At the same time, we also aimed to reduce sign clutter and create a consistent and professional message from north to south."

The signs are as close as 1/4 mile apart near population centers and up to two miles apart or more in remote areas.

The \$78,000 project was funded by visitor fees and Oregon lottery dollars dedicated to state parks.

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Sgt. Matt Phillips, Search and Rescue coordinator for the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office

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