

Elsie-Vinemaple takes emergency role

Inland communities bear burden of tsunami warnings

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

ELSIE — When a tsunami watch was issued early Jan. 23, dozens of people got in their cars and headed for the hills.

By 3 a.m., cars were stranded on the side of the highway — either from running out of gas or from slipping off the black ice that covered the highway that night. A bonfire was already raging in the Camp 18 Restaurant parking lot.

Out to respond was the Community Emergency Response Team from Elsie-Vinemaple, an unincorporated town about 20 miles up Highway 26. The 12-person team walked along the road, going car by car to make sure everyone was safe.

“We were making sure people weren’t frozen in their



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Joel Huckins unpacks a kit containing emergency response supplies at the fire station in Elsie.

cars,” said team member Diane Jette. “People didn’t have gas in their tanks, with little babies bundled up in the back. They were cold and couldn’t go anywhere.”

The event hardly surprised the locals. In fact, it’s a phenomenon that happens nearly every time a tsunami watch or warning is issued along the coast.

As one of the first communities clearly out of the tsunami

inundation zone when heading east from the coast, the all-volunteer response team has come to face the realities of being a default evacuation center when disaster strikes.

“If the coast gets threats of inundation, like it did (in 2011), half the coast ends up here,” said Assistant Fire Chief Hans Mulder of Elsie-Vinemaple Fire Department.

“We get a major influx this way.”

‘Way behind the curve’

Like many community emergency response teams in Clatsop County, the one in Elsie-Vinemaple developed after the 2007 Great Coastal Gale closed roads and shut down power for almost two weeks.

Relative geographic remoteness, no communication and multiple road closures from tree blowdown and flooding isolated the community from major services, Jette said.

Since then, the group has worked to become as self-sufficient as possible, conducting training in emergency medical response, search and rescue, HAM radio operations and mass casualty triage.

While out of the tsunami inundation zone, inland communities have concerns of their own: flooding, power outages, landslides. But the most pressing is an earthquake, which could take out two bridges, isolating the rural community and anyone else who may be there.

The team feels most emergency efforts are geared toward coastal cities, leaving communities inland along

Highway 26 “way behind the curve,” Mulder said.

“All those supplies, they are going to fly it over us to the coast, to the popular centers,” Mulder said. “We feel low on the priority list.”

While the fire station is prepared with about 100 cots and blankets as a Red Cross shelter, unlike other towns along Highway 101, the area has limited access to food and water. There are only a couple of restaurants and one general store that would be pillaged quickly by 100 evacuees.

“If a tsunami really happened, who is going to feed them for two or three days? We can’t afford that much food — it’s just not in the budget,” Mulder said.

The volunteer fire department operates on about \$65,000 each year.

Proper education

Some issues could be addressed by continuing to educate more people about where the inundation zone actually ends, and how to find other safe assembly areas already located in coastal cities, emergency trainer George Jette said.

Jette remembers responding to a vehicle rollover in 2011 where the driver abandoned his car, his credit cards and other personal items on the road.

“He just kept going on foot. He was just so scared of drowning,” he said. “I think sometimes people think they need to get to Portland.”

Because of their relative isolation, both George and Diane Jette said more cross-training with other emergency teams in the county could help them prepare more effectively. Donations of nonperishable food and water would also make a difference.

Overall, Elsie is happy to act as an emergency safe haven the next time either a disaster or disaster warning inevitably happens. But before heading up to the hills, the team has a few requests.

“Remember that we are here, if you need to come up,” Diane Jette said. “But also, when people come up, remember we need aid to help take care of them. Don’t fly over the top of us and drop packages just in Hillsboro and Seaside.”

CANNON BEACH POLICE LOG

May 11

10:15 a.m., 1100 block Spruce Court: Caller reports an argumentative reaction from a neighbor she chastised for feeding raccoons on her porch. No further action taken; caller just wanted the exchange reported.

10:34 p.m., 2100 block Pacific: Caller reports suspicious activity; police determine it is contractors working.

May 12

2:30 p.m., Downtown: A found wallet is turned in and returned to its owner.

4:08 p.m., Beach and Haystack Rock: A found cell phone is reunited with its owner.

6:39 p.m., Elk Creek Road: The owner of a dog reported to be behaving in an aggressive manner tells police they will put the dog inside the house.

May 13

1:34 a.m., Second Avenue and Skate Park: Subjects are warned of camping.

9:55 a.m., 200 block N. Spruce: A person who fell is reported and helped.

12:43 p.m., Tolovana Wayside: Suspicious behavior is reported.

3:07 p.m., Highway 101, MP 33: A barefoot subject reported jumping into traffic tells police they left their shoes at Silver Point to walk on the beach. The person declined a courtesy ride to return to their shoes. No further action was taken.

4:15 p.m., Ocean Avenue and W. Adam: Caller reports visitors to the area are breaking all the parking rules in her neighborhood.

7:28 p.m., Tolovana Beach: A newborn sea lion is reported; officers are

unable to locate.

8:01 p.m., 900 block Ocean: A person sleeping in the grass is offered medical attention and a courtesy ride. Both offers were declined.

9:59 p.m., 100 block S. Hemlock: A person asking for food and a place to stay is offered a courtesy ride, which was accepted. Police say there is a possible mental health issue.

May 14

12:20 a.m., 100 block W. Madison: Subject is warned for overnight camping.

2:26 p.m., 100 block E. Jefferson: Caller complains of a subject’s verbal abuse of residents and visitors.

May 15

9:57 a.m., Chapman Point: Caller reports a vehicle casing a job site. Officers searching the area were

unable to locate.

3:30 p.m., Pacific and Siuclaw: A found bracelet is turned in to the police for safekeeping.

10:32 p.m., E. Second Street: Subjects are warned of overnight camping and switching license plates.

11:37 p.m., E. Second Street: A person is warned for overnight camping; the person says they are a resident, not a visitor or transient, and that they are not camping.

May 16

3:44 p.m., Seaside High School: Cannon Beach police assist Seaside police at the high school.

May 18

4:26 a.m., Second Street parking lot: Subjects are warned of overnight camping.

11:19 p.m., Second Street rest room: Subjects are warned of overnight camping.

11:27 p.m., Second Street sewer ponds: Subjects are warned of overnight camping.

May 19

1:36 p.m., 1200 block S. Hemlock: Subject cited for careless driving.

7:57 p.m., Beach: A lost cell phone is returned to its owner.

10:09 p.m., Second Street restroom: Subjects are warned for overnight camping.

May 20

12:36 a.m., 3700 block Pacific: Police respond to a report of an unwanted female at the residence. Subject had left prior to police arrival; police made contact with her by phone and told

her not to return at the homeowner’s request.

2:05 a.m., 800 block S. Roosevelt: Cannon Beach police assist Seaside police with a traffic stop of a suspicious vehicle.

5:56 a.m., 600 block N. Ash: A subject is arrested for harassment and menacing during a domestic incident; subject is transported to the Clatsop County jail.

11:31 a.m., Highway 26 and Highway 101: Police respond to a report of a man with a rifle; the man tells police he is hunting and had become lost. He said he was walking back to his truck.

4:32 p.m., Haystack Rock: Police respond to a report of a male dropping his pants and exposing himself. Police make contact with the male who denies the behavior. He was with a group of male friends. They all had their pants on.

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