

With ‘big one,’ sirens won’t be necessary

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

When the big one hits, it will be immediately felt, with quakes leading to a potential tsunami 20 minutes later.

The quake, which will strike without warning, will lead to wave heights of 30 to 45 feet and higher. Seven out of 11 bridges will fall down in a tsunami, geologist Tom Horning said.

If the ground is shaking, that is your first warning that a major Cascadia Subduction Zone event is underway.

Do not wait for a siren to get to higher ground. Once the ground stops

shaking and it is safe to do so, people should follow their own pre-planned safety emergency evacuation plan. People should have in place a plan on foot as well as by car since roads may be disrupted by an earthquake. There are several tsunami evacuation routes and there are large tsunami evacuation route symbols on the roads throughout the town to follow to higher ground.

Seaside provides Nixle alerts people can sign up for and receive notifications by text or email.

The county also has an emergency notification system and in an extreme situation has the ability to ping all cell phones in a specific area and send out emergency notifications.

Sirens: Test is typically broadcast voice only

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spending the money, that we were putting way too much into the sirens because they weren't really going to save lives. On the one hand, they have marginal value to life and safety and a high demand for attention and care. The thing that saves lives is getting your butt up and out the door."

Distant tsunami warning

Seaside operates an emergency warning system composed of a series of speakers mounted on poles around the city. In the event of a sudden emergency such as a distant tsunami, the warning system will be activated to alert individuals of the threat. The sirens emit an intermittent 3-minute blast. The emergency warning system is not intended to be audible indoors, but to warn those near the water along beaches, docks and estuaries to move to higher ground.

Before World War II, the bell that is now at the top of the fire station was used to alert volunteer firefighters to a fire in the city. After the end of the war, the sirens continued as a fire alert for volunteers until 1991 on the first day of the Persian Gulf War.

Today there are six warning sirens in Seaside: 24th and North Holladay, 11th and Broadway, Broadway east of Wahanna, Avenue G at the Prom, public works, and the Cove and Seltzer Park. Additional sirens are located in Gearhart at Little Beach and at the 10th Street beach entrance.

The city activated warning sirens in 2011 after the Fukushima, Japan, quake, leading many to evacuate to higher ground and an emergency response.

Seaside's sirens were not triggered by January's distant Tonga quake.

"We act based on all information at hand and we monitor what other communities are doing as far away as Hawaii, Alaska," Moberg said. "Social media, the national alert system and other tools are all useful in helping us know what is coming. When the last tsunami low-level warning activation happened, we could observe a surge of tide down south of us well before it traveled up the coast. We lived-streamed several different areas of the coast in an emergency operation center that was fully operational. We also erred on the side of caution and had safety patrols request people get off the beach."

Testing

All eight sirens should be fully operational, public information officer Esther Moberg said. "We

will be testing that again thoroughly in April with a staff person at each siren in person."

"The sirens are tested once a month with a break during June-August," she said. "The test is typically broadcast voice only and is not the actual sirens. You will be able to hear the sirens clearly in the event of an emergency."

Sometimes people report they do not hear a siren, she said. "Because we are only testing a voice-operated test, this is not always heard indoors," she said.

Testing is limited to once a month so people don't become complacent that in the real scenario, no one reacts.

"That would be very unfortunate," Moberg said. "Once a month is plenty to make sure sirens are working and people have a chance to listen in without disrupting anyone's daily lives."

The test isn't always launched exactly at 11 a.m. either — it is typically between 11 a.m. and noon — so sometimes people miss it as well.

"In the past we have noticed that sirens would bounce off each other when set off at the same exact time so during a test they will be sometimes released in a sequence to prevent sound wave reverberation," Anne McBride, the city's emergency preparedness coordinator, said. "Wind speed can also be a factor for not hearing the tones. Tones are best heard when there are no obstructions in the sound path."

The city doesn't test during summer in order not to cause undue panic to visitors, Moberg said. "When the real alarms go off, everyone will hear it. If it is truly the highest level of alert, the county will send information to all cell phones in the area. We simply don't see the need to cause panic and concern when the peak amount of people are in our city, nor cause a crisis that doesn't exist at that moment in time."

The city maintains a report that shows all are tested and whether or not the signal is received, she said. "We also listen to public comments on where and when they heard the siren (or do not). That said, people don't always hear the test if they are indoors and other noises are going on in the house."

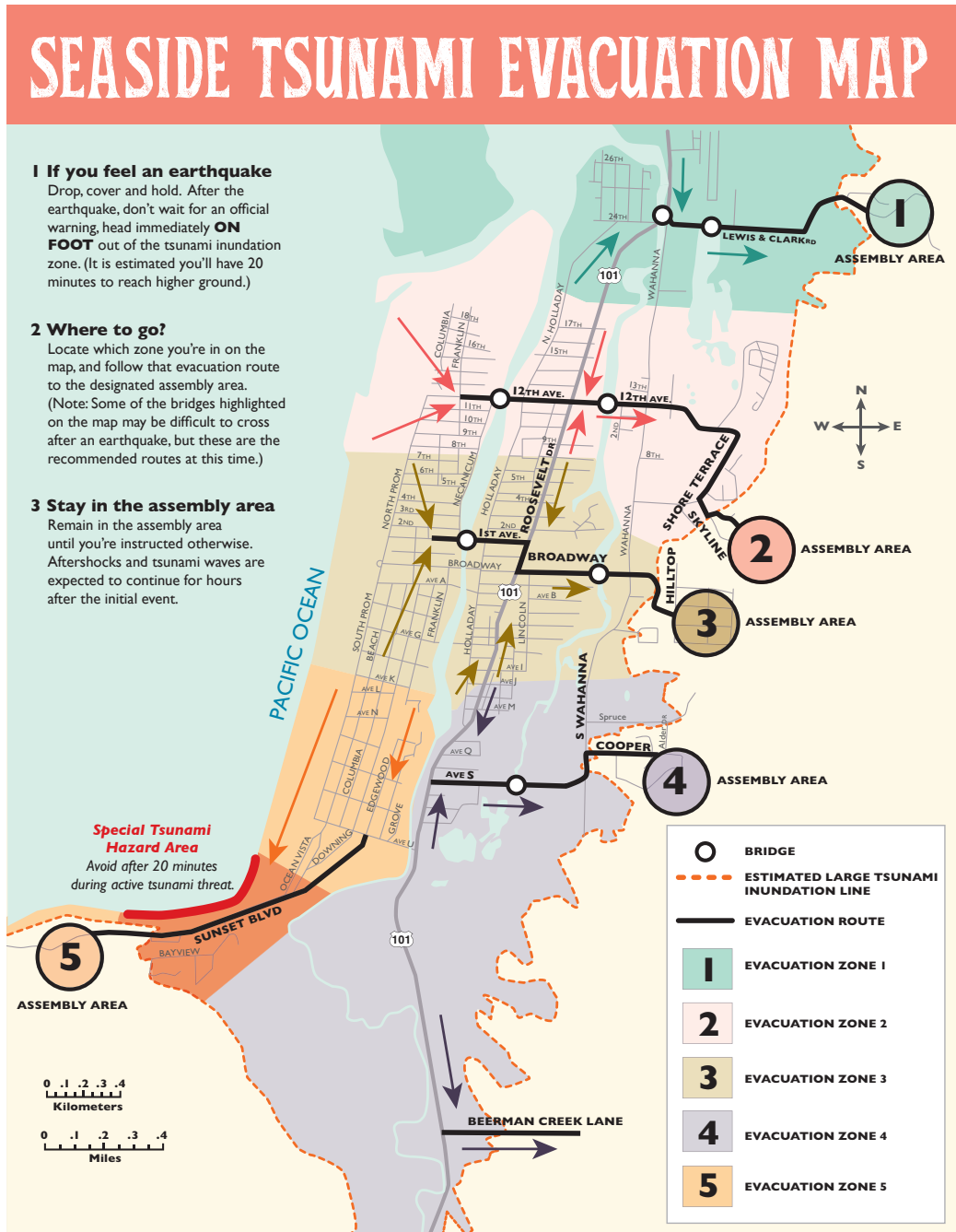
In an emergency, the communications officer or a public information officer, as well as other incident command staff for the city's emergency operations center, would have the protocols necessary to activate sirens.

The command is typically given by the incident commander of the emergency operations at the time. City department heads and other city staff train regularly in emergency operations whenever necessary.

The city will be testing the sirens on April 6 with a staff person at each siren location, McBride said.

"Be prepared, sign up for Nixle alerts, have an emergency evacuation safe route or plan to get to higher ground," Moberg said. "If you need medications or other assistance, be sure your neighbors or loved ones who are nearby are aware and if possible keep extras in your emergency go-bag or ready to grab as you head out the door."

Jennifer North will be listening, she said "with fingers crossed hoping that it works this time."



Whales: Spring migration time for killer whales

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two distinct assemblages, or communities, within that group: coastal transients and outer coast transients.

They've noticed other trends among the whales since marine biologist Michael Bigg first identified them decades ago.

"Transients were very much roamers: They would spend their time going from one area to another," McInnes said. "Now, we're starting to see a bit of a change. They're not so transient anymore."

Unlike resident orcas, transients travel in smaller pods, with the average group size being four to five individuals.

"By staying in smaller family groups, they're able

to use the element of surprise and able to sneak up on their prey, as well as using coordination when hunting," McInnes said.

The diet of transient killer whales is somewhat seasonal, with a big part of it consisting of harbor seals — the most abundant marine mammal species in the Pacific Northwest. Because of that, there also tends to be an increase in sightings of transient killer whales on the Oregon Coast in late spring and early summer, during pupping season.

Their community structure is matrilinear, meaning a mother and her offspring. They typically stay with their family for life, although there is occasionally some dispersal when the whales hit sexual maturity at

14 to 15 years old.

"We can kind of follow these family matrilineal lines throughout their lives. It's quite spectacular," McInnes said, adding they conduct complete census work that includes information on mortality and birth rights.

From 2006 to 2018, they collected more than 113,000 photographs of transient killer whales from nearly 150 encounters. From these photographs, they identified 150 individuals and 30 matrilineal groups.

Emerging research

There's another group of killer whales emerging on which there is very little research: oceanic killer whales. A total of 40 oceanic killer whales were identified between 1997 and 2021.

They are predominately found seaward of the continental shelf.

There are no links in association between these whales and outer coast transient killer whales, McInnes said, adding, "We're not sure where they fit in."

"We're still learning new things about killer whales in the open ocean," he said. "It's an exciting time for us."

To view McInnes' full presentation on killer whales, visit the Friends of Haystack Rock Facebook page or YouTube channel. The organization's Library Series features recurring lectures that include different speakers and topics. The events are held on the second Wednesday of every month from November to May.



Selena Rivera

Killer whale seen off the Pacific Coast.

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