



Members of Gardiner's Community Emergency Response Team, from left, Dick Bennett, Bill Campbell, Bob McCauley and Mickey Hodis stand outside the team's storage container they raised funds for to hold search and rescue supplies. In case of a major earthquake, team members will use it as a headquarters as search operations begin. Sequim Gazette photo by Matthew Nash

A look at emergency preparedness across Sequim

by Matthew Nash

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News

Residents in and around Sequim are taking earthquake preparedness to a new level. With volunteers for Community Emergency Response Teams, or CERT, totaling more than 300 people late last year, locals are beginning to catch the message that something big might be on the horizon.

Sequim and other first responders are following research that Sequim and the West Coast are overdue for a significant earthquake from the Cascadia Subduction Zone. Assistant Chief Dan Orr with Clallam County Fire District 3 said scientists predict there is a 33 percent chance of at least an 8.0 earthquake or a 10 percent chance of a 9.0 or greater quake happening within the next 50 years.

To combat that, residents are strategizing ways to help neighbors for any sizable quake. Gardiner's response team is currently one of 10 teams across the Sequim area with more teams forming including Mains Farm, Orr said.

The Gardiner team features 21 members who continue to meet monthly and plan search and rescue efforts across 5 square miles for about 350 residents.

Despite their efforts, team member Dick Bennett said his team and others have found some resistance to their preparations.

"There's a lot of apathy out there," he said. "Trying to get people to break out of that has been challenging."

But the small group has pushed on and continues to think big.

Their biggest project was fundraising to bring in a cargo container to store supplies.

Bennett said the Gardiner Salmon Derby Association provided a grant and local residents donated to purchase the long box while another local resident donated space for it to sit. Tracy's Insulation provided insulation for the box and Gardiner resident and CERT member Bill Campbell built the shelves, too.

Backup plan

Team members said they had emergency supplies stored in the Gardiner Community Center but figured it might be standing following an earthquake so they sought other options.

Bennett said the container will be a command center following an earthquake and Fire District 3 staff authorized them to enact their own pre-approved action plan.

Orr said this is because Gardiner, like other communities, will become an island once water levels rise from a tsunami and bridges are destroyed.

In the Sequim area, Orr said sizable islands will form following a large earthquake from Discovery Bay to Blyn, from Blyn to the Dungeness River, from the river to McDonald Creek, and from that creek to Siebert Creek.

That's not including other overpasses and smaller bridges that may collapse and block vehicle traffic to create micro-islands.

For now, Gardiner team members are focused on collecting items for their container such as pry bars, shovels, blankets, first aid kits, and much more.

Bennett said team members purchase items when possible and are considering items such as cots, higher powered radios and an antennae, and a rickshaw.

Campbell said their team is preparing for a number of scenarios ranging from potential hazards with propane tanks to travelers stranded on nearby US Highway 101.

Team member Bob McCauley said due to the terrain walkie talkies may not reach far, so each of the team's three clusters, or search parties, has at least one HAM radio operator.

Mickey Hodis is one of the most western Gardiner residents and plans to use her amateur radio to communicate with other team members and residents further west into Sequim. With less than 10 percent of Gardiner residents trained under CERT, Hodis encourages those opting not to participate to at least be prepared and take care of potential hazards like strapping down propane tanks.

Hodis said prior to her most recent training, she felt she did good job of preparing for a potential disaster but CERT has brought her expertise to a new level. "I can't understand why you wouldn't want to learn from FEMA, the fire department and other medics to learn the best way to take care of your family and friends in a disaster," Following her training, Hodis said one thing she's done is move her supplies away from her chimney because following an earthquake, it's likely it would collapse and wouldn't be accessible after a quake.

30 days, 60 minutes

First responders are telling CERT trainees that 30 days of supplies is a good planning point as immediate response may take days or weeks before someone can access you and your home following a substantial earthquake.

However, on 3 Crabs Road in Dungeness and across the coastline, several residents live along the water and they're being told to store those supplies out of the tsunami zone.

Orr said those residents should store at least 30 days of supplies in a storage facility or with friends out of the 40 feet or lower elevation zone along the water.

"If you live in the tsunami zone, it doesn't make sense to have 30 days of supplies at home," he said. "Put it elsewhere."

Mac Macdonald, a 3 Crabs Road resident and CERT trainee, said he and other residents have been preparing for evacuating the area following an earthquake.

"With the bridge sunk, we've got to find the most expedient way to get out, so we'll have to go through wetlands towards the hills," he said.

He and neighbors recently walked their escape route to see how it'd go.

Macdonald said even on a nice day he was up to his ankles in water and he wonders what if it were nighttime, snowy, and/or high tide.

Those in the tsunami zone are told not to take more than 15 minutes to escape their homes and help others following an earthquake, Macdonald said, because they have about an hour overall before a tsunami hits. Macdonald moved to 3 Crabs Road more than a year ago and felt he's always been proactive with preparedness stocking up on water and health bars and staying fit.

Prior to any disaster, he says complacency is residents' greatest danger.

"I ask myself all the time — 'am I ready?'" Macdonald said. He wonders if neighbors know the escape routes and if they have enough supplies too. One neighbor told him how his truck would be handy for escape following an earthquake. "I told him that with cracked up roads, caved in bridges, and land that looks like a World War I battlefield, don't even think you can out-macho Mother Nature. But we can outthink her," he said. For him and others, Macdonald said emergency preparedness training like CERT provides the best mental and physical tools to keep a level head in a disaster. "It's a feather in our cap here," he said. Community Emergency Response Team classes are offered for free on the second, third and fourth Saturdays of each month from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. through Clallam County Fire District 3. Those interested can contact CERT coordinator Cindy Zechenelly at cert@ccfd3.org, czechenelly@ccfd3.org or call 360-683-4242. March's classes are full but some spots are open for April. For more information on emergency preparedness, look for the "Peninsula Emergency Preparedness Guide" at the fire district's website www.ccfd3.org. Reach Matthew Nash at mnash@sequimgazette.com.



Dick Bennett with Gardiner Community Emergency Response Team said right now they have 21 team members to search 5-square miles following an earthquake to make sure Gardiner's 350 residents are OK. He said they are also planning for people being trapped along US Highway 101 too. Sequim Gazette photo by Matthew Nash"



"Following a major earthquake, residents along 3 Crabs Road are advised to evacuate from their homes along marshland to higher ground, as seen here from the road's unfinished bridge in 2016. Fire officials with Clallam County Fire District 3 say the bridge will likely be down and residents have about an hour before a tsunami would hit the area. Sequim Gazette file photo by Matthew Nash"