

JAPAN'S EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI

ARE WE READY?

Tsunami causes no local damage, but siren problems discovered

BY ERIN DIETRICH
Headlight Herald

Tillamook County escaped with no known damages or injuries during the March 11 distant tsunami that caused damage on the southern Oregon and northern California coasts from ocean surges. The scare served as a kind of dress rehearsal for a more major event, as emergency shelters were opened throughout Tillamook County and a malfunctioning tsunami siren was discovered.

Hundreds of residents in low-lying areas along the Oregon coast evacuated their homes for higher ground as waves up to eight feet high were predicted to

hit certain areas, following a devastating 8.9 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Japan.

A tsunami watch for the Oregon coast was upgraded in the middle of the night to a warning. Tillamook County's tsunami sirens first sounded at 5 a.m. March 11 from Manzanita to Neskowin, sending a steady stream of evacuees seeking higher ground. The sirens sounded again at 6 a.m., 6:30 a.m. and then at 15-minute intervals until the first waves were expected to reach shore just after 7 a.m.

The county also made reverse, prerecorded 9-1-1 calls to about 6,000 homes within a half-mile of the coast urging res-

idents to evacuate.

Initial wave heights were predicted to reach up to 3.5 feet in Oceanside and 3.2 feet in Neskowin, although the tsunami reached shore much later than was predicted and surges were smaller.

The first surges at Tillamook Bay were reported after 10 a.m. and were one to two feet in height.

"We were lucky enough that it was closer to low tide, with no impact or damage," said Petty Officer Donald Lanham of the Tillamook Bay U.S. Coast Guard Station.

See **DAMAGE**, Page A9

WAVE HEIGHTS PREDICTED VS. ACTUAL

ASTORIA:
10.62 INCHES
7.08 INCHES

GARIBALDI:
NO PREDICTION
1.1 FEET

NESKOWIN:
3.2 FEET
ACTUAL NOT RECORDED

NEWPORT:
4 FEET
ACTUAL NOT RECORDED

YACHTS:
4.4 FEET
ACTUAL NOT RECORDED

CHARLESTON:
1.9 FEET
2.32 FEET

PORT ORFORD:
6 FEET
6.6 FEET

BROOKINGS:
7.4 FEET
APPROX. 8 FEET

Tsunami economics

Evacuation orders give boost to local businesses

Hundreds of coastal residents evacuated their homes in the pre-dawn hours of March 11, filling gas tanks and packing into diners on higher ground.

Employees at the county's only 24-hour gas station were caught off guard around 12:30 a.m. when a surge of cars began showing up at the Tillamook Shell Station on Third and Pacific.

A night employee alerted Mike Sheldon, co-owner of Sheldon Oil, about two hours later.

"It kept getting busier and busier," Sheldon said. "I made the decision to open the other stations as early as I could at Garibaldi... and in Pacific City."

Those stations were opened for business between 3:30-4 a.m.

Michelle Walker, a waitress at Alice's Country House on Highway 6 east of Tillamook, said people were waiting in the parking lot when she came in to work at 5:30 a.m.

See **ECONOMICS**, Page A9

WAITING FOR 'THE BIG ONE'

Japan's tragedy a wake-up call

BY LAURA RUGGERI
Headlight Herald

TILLAMOOK - If a large, local tsunami hits the Oregon coast, "what you saw in Japan is what you can expect to see on our coast," said James Roddey, the earth science information officer for the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries.

The Cascadia Subduction Zone, about 75 miles off the coast of Oregon, has the potential to create what Roddey calls "the big one."

A Cascadia Subduction earthquake will cause a local tsunami, arriving onshore approximately 20 minutes after the earthquake. A large magnitude earthquake could create a 30- to 40-foot wall of water; it could reach 75 feet above sea level.

If the water comes over the Bayocean Spit, a 20- to 30-foot wall of water has the potential to hit the city of Tillamook, Roddey said. Even if the tsunami doesn't come over the spit, it will come in the mouth of the bay and tidal surges will come up all of the rivers.

Parts of Tillamook are between 20- to 50-feet above sea level. But homes along the rivers or people standing along the banks of those rivers may be swept away. Massive tidal surges will take out bridges as well.

See **BIG ONE**, Page A9



HOW PREPARED ARE WE? JOIN THE CONVERSATION AT
[FACEBOOK.COM/TILLAMOOKHEADLIGHTERALD](https://www.facebook.com/tillamookheadlightherald)

ECONOMICS: *Continued from Page A1*

"We were really crowded," Walker said. "We had the TV on for people – we had some that kept listening to it on the news – they tried to hang out as long as they could, but they wanted to get home too because they were really tired."

Tillamook Denny's general manager Keith Cassel said customers started to trickle in at about 4 a.m. March 11. But while business was much busier than usual, many of the restaurant's employees live in Rockaway Beach and had evacuated.

"We had a lot of people who stayed

from graveyard shift – we all pulled together and had a great day," Cassel said. "People were understanding, knowing what was going on, and we had a lot of people with nowhere else to go."

The Big Wave Cafe in Manzanita is only about 10 blocks from the beach and about 90 feet above sea level. Owner Marcy Russo got a 6 a.m. phone call March 11 to learn that people were using her parking lot as an evacuation spot. So she came in and opened early with two other employees and, for a while, no cook.

"It was awesome," she said. "We actually had some locals come in and help us out, bus tables, make coffee – they just kind of pitched in and helped us."

Although some of her elderly customers were scared and unsure what to do, Russo said everyone was in a good mood for the most part.

"I'm a real local restaurant," she said. "I've been here almost 15 full years, in the 16th season, and I know almost everybody. We've had two other scares, but not like this."

DAMAGE: *Continued from Page A1*

"We'd see the water go out and then come surging back in to a level it would not normally be.

"Every 30 minutes you'd see a surge," he said. "It was noticeable but not enough to cause any damage here."

At least five emergency shelters were opened after the recommendation to evacuate any residents within a half-mile of beaches. At one point, up to 80 or 90 people were using the shelters, said Emergency Manager Gordon McCraw.

"After hours and what appeared to be minimal effects from the tsunami locally, a lot of them returned on their own to their homes," he said. "A lot of shelters ended up with no one left so they ended up closing."

There were no tsunami-related damages in any part of Tillamook County, according to McCraw.

"All our citizens did wonderfully – they stuck to the plan, stayed away from beaches

and responded appropriately," said Jerry Rilette, emergency manager for Rockaway Beach. "I was extremely pleased with cooperation of the citizens."

Rilette was hired after Rockaway Beach received a grant from the Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) for tsunami preparedness. While some residents assembled at the city's designated assembly areas on the morning of March 11, most people either left town altogether or drove to Tillamook for breakfast, according to Rilette.

"It was a good opportunity for our citizens to practice their plan and by all accounts it was a good result," Rilette said.

"The county's emergency operations center did a great job – it worked exactly like it was supposed to work. Sometimes it doesn't go that way, but I'm grateful it did."

Officials discovered during the event that Garibaldi's tsunami siren atop city hall fired only intermittently, and the

siren in Oceanside was down for repairs on the morning of March 11. Still, Netarts-Oceanside Fire District Chief Tim Carpenter said things went well for his communities.

"I had good participation and good communication between us, our incident management team and 9-1-1," Carpenter said. "Fortunately, it was only what it was."

Carpenter said emergency officials were aware that the Oceanside siren was not installed, as they were awaiting a break in weather to place it back on its pole. Instead, they were prepared with a backup warning system, which involved driving an emergency vehicle through town with the siren blaring, talking over a loudspeaker and going door-to-door.

"A lot of people had already been notified with reverse 9-1-1," Carpenter added. "The siren is just one source of notification – you can't just rely on one."

The evacuation ran smooth-

ly in south Tillamook County as well. Residents were notified to evacuate using reverse 9-1-1 calls, tsunami sirens and fire engines that drove through towns with sirens, according to Nestucca Rural Fire Protection

Chief Kris Weiland

