

Oregon Coast dotted with community supply caches for the ‘big one’ and other emergencies

By Kristian Foden-Vencil
Oregon Public Broadcasting
February 17, 2025

The threat of earthquakes, tsunamis and wildfires has towns and homeowner groups setting up their own community prep kits.

Karen Andreika arrived in Depoe Bay, Oregon, from Northern California a decade ago just as *The New Yorker* published an article about Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquakes and the likelihood of a major quake within 50 years.

Andreika was a retiree relocating to be near her children, but as she read the story detailing just how paralyzing the damage from a big quake could be, she wondered about her decision. “I thought, ‘What have I done?’”

Her solution was to join the Depoe Bay Fire Department’s Emergency Response Team, “Well, I mean that’s how you meet people. You join things and you volunteer.” As part of that team, Andreika helped her east Depoe Bay homeowners’ association raise \$10,000 to buy an old shipping container, pack it with supplies and park it in the neighborhood.

“We’ve got beans, oatmeal and rice for long-term storage,” she said, pointing out different items around the container on a recent morning. When the next Cascadia quake hits, experts say Oregon’s coastal towns could be on their own for up to six weeks. Roads connecting the coast to the rest of the state could be impassable. Phone lines and other basic communication systems may shut down. And the power will likely be off for an extended period.

As a result, scores of coastal organizations are buying shipping containers or big plastic bins and filling them with emergency supplies for the community. It’s a basic step emergency responders say all of us should take in our own homes — having supplies ready in case of a natural disaster.

Andreika said she and her neighbors are learning the science of preparedness. For example, they initially stored water inside their shipping container. But condensation formed on the sides of the tanks, like sweat on a glass of iced tea, prompting mold problems. Now the water is stored outside.

We want to designate our cul-de-sac as a landing zone,” said Andreika, whose neighborhood is high on a hill, far back from the ocean and potential tsunami damage. “This is where a lot of people from down below will end up, and we wanted to have supplies to help with them.”

Across town, at Little Whale Cove, Anne Bradley has helped her homeowners’ association set up a ham radio station and store first-aid kits, garbage bags, bleach, ropes and water, all at the neighborhood clubhouse.

At home, she has also stockpiled sleeping bags, blankets, a lantern, a generator and...a plastic toilet. “It’s an important concept,” she said. “Your stomach is not going to be happy after three days of food that it’s not used to eating.

”Homeowners’ associations have taken the lead in creating emergency caches in many coastal communities. But Depoe Bay Mayor Kathy Short said the city and the fire department also have caches. If the big one hits during the tourist season, coastal populations will be tripled or even quadrupled for weeks.

Short said state advisers have given her some stark advice.

“Go look up mushrooms. Go look up ferns. Go look up everything that is natural that you can eat because you could be without for months,” Short said.

Experts say a severe earthquake could create an “island effect” for coastal communities, with towns cut off from other communities. The coast is particularly vulnerable because it’s close to the Cascadia fault line and older bridges along Highway 101 might not survive.

Different towns along the Oregon coast are preparing differently. Seaside has filled 119 barrels with enough food to last 20 people three days and stored them at homes high above the tsunami zone. Newport has invested in creating high spots around town where people can go in a

tsunami.

Residents all along the coast are being advised to pack go bags with medications, food, radios, clothes and cash. It's an important preparatory step for both potential tsunamis and wildfires.

Emergency managers say one of the best ways to prepare is to know your neighbors, because most people rescued after a big disaster are rescued by a neighbor, not a professional first responder.

Also, people who like to camp tend to be well prepared for an emergency. That's because they already own a tent, camping equipment, a tarp and water purification equipment.

Experts expect the next big one to shake the ground so violently it'll be impossible to stand for up to four minutes. A tsunami could follow 20 minutes later.