

Conservation Corps Heads to Grays Harbor

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) is deploying Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crews to help respond to a reported increase of marine debris on the state's coastal beaches.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) confirmed June 19 that a 20-foot fiberglass boat that washed ashore at Cape Disappointment State Park near Ilwaco was from Japan and swept out to sea by the March 11, 2011, tsunami.

There has also been an apparent increase in other items reported on Washington's outer shores such as Styrofoam, plastic bottles and household appliances that also may be part of the estimated 1.5 million tons of tsunami debris deposited in the Pacific Ocean.

Ecology is deploying three six-person crews starting Monday June 25 where potential tsunami debris has been reported -- North Beach from Moclips to Ocean Shores, South Beach from Westport to Wash-Away Beach, and the Long Beach Peninsula.

Ecology has committed the crews for four days to assess the extent of the debris and need for further removal efforts. WCC's AmeriCorps members and staff will work with community volunteers and staff from the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission to identify and remove debris.

About the WCC Program

In the past decade, WCC crews have responded to tornados, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, and oil spills.

Crews have undertaken a wide variety of response actions, including cutting and removing trees, brush and other hazards, operating shelters; and cleaning up damaged homes and buildings.

The WCC was established in 1983 as a program for unemployed or underemployed young adults. In 1994, the WCC received federal AmeriCorps funding and, in recent years, expanded to more than 35 locations across the state.

The WCC's AmeriCorps members are young adults, including recently returned military veterans. Members receive job training, help restore and protect Washington's environment, offer environmental education and volunteer opportunities for thousands of Washingtonians, and provide direct assistance to citizens of our state and across the nation during floods, fires, hurricanes and other natural disasters.

WCC members and staff have attended various trainings, including wild land firefighting, search and rescue, and flood and hazardous material response.

Young adults who complete a year of WCC service earn state minimum wage for hourly work and a \$5,550 AmeriCorps Education Award that they can use for repaying student loans or toward future tuition expenses.

More about tsunami debris:

- Anyone encountering oil or hazardous materials on Washington beaches should call 1-800-OILS-911.

- Widely scattered debris has been arriving intermittently along Pacific Northwest shorelines. For more information, go to NOAA's marine debris website at <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/tsunamidebris/>

- NOAA is actively collecting information about tsunami debris and asks the public to report debris sightings to disasterdebris@noaa.gov.

- The Washington Department of Ecology has been distributing information about what to do when encountering tsunami debris. http://www.ecy.wa.gov/news/2012/itn01_debris.html

- Washington Department of Health believes it is highly unlikely any tsunami debris is radioactive. More at www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Emergency/TsunamiDebrisFAQ.aspx

- It is possible that containers with hazardous materials such as oil drums or fuel canisters will wash ashore. Don't touch or try to remove the items. Call both the National Response Center at 1-800-424-8802 and state Military Department Emergency Management Division at 1-800-OILS-911 (1-800-258-5990).

- If boaters encounter large debris item still in the water, call the National Response Center at 1-800-424-8802.