

Public Meetings Scheduled on Tsunami Marine Debris

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Washington State Marine Debris Task Force is inviting people to three community meetings on the Pacific coast to gather feedback and answer questions about the state plan for responding to marine debris that may cross the Pacific Ocean and reach our shores from the tragic March 11, 2011, Japan tsunami. Meetings are scheduled for: **Nov. 7 in Port Angeles** – 6 p.m., Port Angeles Senior Center, 328 E. 7th Street (corner of Peabody and 7th streets). **Nov. 15 in Ocean Shores** – 6:30 p.m., Ocean Shores Convention Center, 120 W. Chance A La Mer Ave. **Dec. 5 in Long Beach** – 3 p.m., Peninsula Church Center, 5000 “N” Place, Seaview. Gov. Chris Gregoire established the task force – consisting of the state Military Department’s Emergency Management Division (EMD) and several other state agencies – to coordinate state, federal and local activities to monitor and respond appropriately to marine debris along the Washington coast. The task force collaborated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to develop the plan. ***Anyone encountering potentially hazardous debris should leave it alone and immediately call the state’s 1-855-WACOAST (1-855-922-6278) number and press “1” to reach an operator who can dispatch responders.***

The response plan is designed to address both high-impact types of debris, such a large dock or debris containing a hazardous substance such as oil, as well as a potential steady influx of small nonhazardous debris. The tsunami claimed nearly 20,000 lives, destroyed countless homes and structures and swept 5 million tons of debris into the Pacific Ocean. While 70 percent of the debris sank near Japan’s shore, the remaining 1.5 million tons of debris dispersed in the ocean. EMD’s Terry Egan, the state’s marine debris task force lead, said: “The plan is meant to be dynamic and evolve over time. Continued coordination with local communities will help ensure our response efforts meet the needs of each community, and that our limited resources get out to the right places at the right times.” The task force will oversee and continually update the state marine debris response plan. The plan is available at http://marinedebris.wa.gov/docs/respo..._marinedebris_09182012.pdf It is unknown exactly what, how much and when debris will arrive. Washington saw a spike in amounts of marine debris on its coastal beaches in June 2012 but the quantity washing ashore has since decreased significantly. However, fall and winter weather and ocean current patterns typically wash more marine debris ashore than summertime conditions. According to NOAA, a portion of that debris has been arriving on U.S. and Canadian shores, including Washington. Predictions are that the debris will show up on Washington’s shores intermittently during the next several years. The plan recognizes that incidents involving high-impact debris will be unique and difficult to predict. It is designed to give local, tribal, state and federal responders flexibility in rapidly assessing a debris item, identifying which agencies are needed to respond and what resources will be necessary to protect public health, safety and the environment. Because no state, federal or local entity is officially tasked with removing nonhazardous debris from coastal beaches, the plan calls for supporting volunteer beach cleanup efforts, such as providing gloves, litter bags and trash bins. Should cleanup needs outstrip local resources, the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) may, if requested, deploy Washington Conservation Corps crews

to areas of need. Pacific County Emergency Management Director Stephanie Fritts said the public can help by leaving beaches better than they find them. "Citizens and volunteers can help keep our coastal beaches clean by disposing of small nonhazardous items in their household garbage service such as plastic bottles and floats, polystyrene, crates and other small objects wherever possible." However, anyone encountering potentially hazardous debris should leave it alone and immediately call the state's 1-855-WACOAST (1-855-922-6278) number and press "1" to reach an operator who can dispatch responders.

More about planning efforts The state plan is designed to coordinate rapid responses to marine debris of significant impact — particularly items that are large, contain hazardous substances such as oil or toxic chemicals, or pose invasive species concerns. Ecology and U.S. Coast Guard will respond to petroleum products or other hazardous materials that wash up on our beaches. This includes items such as spilled oil, drums and barrels, fuel tanks, gas cylinders, chemical totes and other containers with unknown fluids. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will respond to invasive species concerns. The department anticipates marine debris with invasive species attached will be rare and limited to large structures that spend a long time in their native waters such as boats, docks, navigation aids and breakwaters. People may find organisms attached to other items — sometimes in heavy accumulations — but these will be common open ocean species such as pelagic gooseneck barnacles. For more, see <http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/tsunami/>. The Washington Department of Health (Health) radiation will respond to any debris marked with words or symbols indicating it may be radioactive. Health experts do not expect to find any marine debris with elevated radiation levels. Earlier tests on debris items revealed only expected low, background levels of radiation. For more information, go to <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Eme...ate/TsunamiDebrisFAQ.aspx>. Numerous entities manage Washington's 375 miles of coastal beaches including: Hoh Indian Tribe, Makah Nation, Quileute Indian Tribe, Quinault Indian Nation, Shoalwater Bay Tribe, Olympic National Park, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission