

NTHMP NEWS

2018 Oregon Tsunami Conference

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On December 3rd and 4th, 2018, professionals and volunteers from across Oregon converged on the city of Newport, Oregon for the 2nd state Tsunami Conference, funded and supported by a NOAA/NWS Tsunami Activities grant through the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program. Representatives from local, state, and federal government agencies, along with local tribes, university students and professors, civilian volunteer groups, the U.S. armed services, and private businesses were all in attendance to share and learn about Oregon's tsunami preparedness and mitigation efforts, and to discuss strategies for response and emergency support for when the unthinkable, but inevitable, Cascadia tsunami occurs.

The conference began with welcome speeches from several state and federal officials, including: Althea Rizzo, the Geologic Hazards Program Coordinator for Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM); Bob Cowen, director of Oregon State University's (OSU) Hatfield Marine Science Center; Mike Harryman, Oregon State Resilience Officer; Oregon Representative David Gomberg; and U.S. Representative Suzanne Bonamici.



“This is an opportunity to bring together professionals on the coast to get us prepared for the inevitable tsunami that we’re expecting,” said Althea Rizzo, organizer of the conference. “...Preparing for Cascadia, it’s kind of the gold standard. When you’re prepared for Cascadia, you’re prepared for anything the coast can throw at you.”

Oregon’s efforts to mitigate and save lives through investments in critical infrastructure such as airports, schools, hospitals and ports, were a major point of discussion from the beginning of the conference. Talks on the first day began with an extensive background of the earthquakes and tsunamis generated by the Cascadia Subduction Zone, presented by Dr. Chris Goldfinger of OSU. Next, Larry Burtness, a representative of the Quileute Tribe of Washington, spoke about the efforts of the tribe to move the village of La Push to higher ground outside of the tsunami inundation zone. Yong Chen from OSU discussed the far-reaching and lasting economic impacts of a Cascadia event.

The second day of the conference featured speakers from OEM, OSU, California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development. Each offered in-depth discussions on the main topics of the conference: response and recovery, mitigation funding, education and outreach, land use planning and economic issues, and policy making. Following lunch, breakout sessions expanded on those topics, each group brainstorming and collaborating to solve common problems within their respective themes. Having such a diverse group of participants offered a unique opportunity to share ideas and plans from across many different perspectives.

Attendees were treated to an engaging and eye-opening talk by keynote speaker Mona Barnes, Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency and Homeland Security Advisor to the Governor of the Virgin Islands. She spoke not just about how the Virgin Islands are preparing and planning for tsunami hazards, but also about the challenges faced and lessons learned from hurricanes Irma and Maria, both Category 5 hurricanes which struck the territory within two weeks of one another in 2017. While proper preparation and planning are extremely important for saving lives and recovering after disaster, Mrs. Barnes stated that real preparation begins much closer to home than at the state or even local levels. “Talk to your family and have your own plan of what you will do if an event happens. The key...is don’t depend on the government to determine your survivability.”