DISASTER DRAW

After the Coast Moves

Earthquake, tsunami, and the long work of coming home

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About this edition

An original synthesis of linked primary accounts and practical discussion exercises. Hypothetical scenes are identified in the text. Independent expert review is pending. Consult current local instructions for an actual emergency.

Contents

A date that belongs to the coast

While the room is moving

The coast has a second clock

A region of separate households

The water behind the wall

The neighborhood after the alert

The scenario and your address

A rehearsal with an interruption

The month after the exercise

Coming back

A date that belongs to the coast

The USGS catalog records the 1700 Cascadia earthquake at magnitude 9.0. The date in the catalog uses UTC, which is why a reader may see January 27 while regional accounts refer to the evening of January 26. The event is a historical anchor for a future regional hazard, rather than a schedule for its return. USGS catalog

Cascadia reaches beyond a single town's emergency plan. Oregon's emergency-management account describes the subduction zone, its capacity for a very large earthquake, and the coastal tsunami hazard. A household may encounter shaking, damaged roads, water interruptions, displacement, or several of those problems together. The pattern will depend on where it is and what happens there. Oregon Emergency Management

An inland apartment, a coastal campground, and a business beside a river need different plans. They share a geological hazard while occupying different places within it. The task is to locate yourself before the event asks you to act.

While the room is moving

The first task during shaking is immediate protection. USGS guidance describes dropping, taking cover, and holding on. Learn the guidance for the circumstances you actually occupy, including being indoors, outside, or using a mobility aid. Practice in the room where you spend time. An instruction remembered vaguely may become a route toward falling objects. USGS earthquake guidance

Imagine a home office. This is a hypothetical exercise. A heavy shelf stands beside the desk and a hanging object sits above the chair. Before discussing an emergency bag, ask whether these objects can be secured or

repositioned appropriately. The preparation is close at hand. It does not depend on forecasting the earthquake's date.

After shaking, damaged surroundings demand care. Another jolt can occur. A building's familiar appearance cannot establish its safety. Follow official inspection and reentry instructions, and keep the route to your supplies from depending on entering a damaged space.

The coast has a second clock

In a coastal tsunami zone, strong or long shaking can itself be a warning. Washington's agencies emphasize evacuation to high ground or inland without waiting for an electronic alert when natural warnings occur. Once the shaking permits safe movement, use the local evacuation plan. Local maps matter because terrain, routes, and available time differ. Washington emergency guidance Washington DNR

This produces a difficult planning question for a visitor. A hotel address is easy to save. An evacuation route takes more attention. Which direction leads out of the hazard zone? Can everyone in the party walk it? Does it cross a bridge? What is the accessible option? Ask these questions before a holiday, and share the answers with the people who will use them.

The route should be practiced safely in ordinary conditions. A line on a map does not reveal a locked gate, a tiring gradient, or the time needed by a particular household member. An exercise can discover the problem while an alternative is still easy to arrange.

A region of separate households

A family may ordinarily reunite at home every evening. After a regional earthquake, going home could require crossing damaged transport links. A communications plan should allow people to remain in separate safe places. A shared contact can help them exchange status without making immediate reunion the first objective.

Use this hypothetical exercise. Put each person's usual weekday location on paper. Mark the major connections between those locations. Then choose a safe place each person could remain if the connection became unavailable. Decide what message to send, whom to send it to, and how long people should expect uncertainty.

The Red Cross recommends agreeing on contacts, meeting arrangements, and responsibilities beforehand. Include the people who may need assistance in those conversations. A plan made for them without their participation can miss the equipment, communication method, or support they actually use. Red Cross

The water behind the wall

A water supply is easy to forget when every ordinary day begins at a tap. A regional disaster can make the source, distribution system, and household access separate problems. Preparing an accessible supply is one household action. Following the utility's actual notices is another.

Oregon's Cascadia guidance encourages preparedness for a substantial regional interruption. Use its current local recommendations to set a household target, then work toward it in manageable steps. A storage plan that nobody can carry or reach does not meet the needs of the people it is meant to help. Oregon Emergency Management

Consider a tenant with little storage space. They can still write contacts down, secure permitted furnishings, speak with the landlord, learn the evacuation arrangements, and keep some usable supplies. Preparedness should allow incremental progress. An ideal shopping list that remains unstarted provides little help.

The neighborhood after the alert

A regional emergency creates an information problem. People will hear road reports, restoration estimates, and accounts from elsewhere. For each report, ask who issued it, when, and which location it describes. An accurate message from yesterday can be misleading today.

A neighborhood can decide in advance how to exchange verified updates when normal communication is difficult. The meeting place should itself be appropriate to the local hazards. A coastal gathering point in an inundation zone would defeat the purpose. Keep the arrangement simple enough that an occasional visitor can understand it.

Assistance should be based on consent and actual needs. Ask which check-in a neighbor would welcome. Ask who else has agreed to help. Write down the handover so that help does not disappear when the first person has to leave or rest.

The scenario and your address

A regional scenario is a tool for studying consequences under assumptions. Washington's magnitude-9 Cascadia modeling describes a long rupture and evaluates its effects across a region. A modeled result is useful because it lets planners examine a coherent event. It should travel with the source assumptions and its geographic limits. Washington scenario

Your address asks more specific questions. Is it in a tsunami zone? Which route is designated? What building are you in? Which household members need assistance? The scenario can establish the seriousness of preparation without answering each of those questions. Local maps, building information, and conversations supply the next layer.

Try an address exercise with three places you use. Include a home, a workplace or school, and a place you visit near the coast. For each, locate the relevant official information and record the date you checked it. Write down whom to ask about anything unclear. The exercise produces a usable file and a short question list.

Do not let the search for a perfect map delay obvious work. You can arrange contacts, make supplies accessible, and practice protective actions while pursuing a building-specific question. Different preparations can move at different speeds.

A rehearsal with an interruption

A good rehearsal includes a complication. Once a family has agreed on a meeting arrangement, ask what happens if the usual phone is unavailable. Once a coastal group has walked a route, ask what happens if one person needs assistance. Once an organization has named a backup, ask whether the backup can read the instructions without the usual account.

These are hypothetical exercises. Keep them safe and manageable. A rehearsal should not involve entering closed areas, obstructing a road, or testing a live emergency service. Its value comes from exposing assumptions through conversation and ordinary practice.

Let the people most affected describe the difficulty. Someone who uses a mobility aid may know which apparently minor surface makes a route unusable. A caregiver may know why a supply must remain within reach. A tenant may know which building question has to be taken to

management. The planner's job is to hear the answer and make the agreement concrete.

Finish each rehearsal with a small revision. Record the revised contact, route question, or assistance arrangement. Then tell everyone who relies on it. A changed plan known only to its author can be as confusing as no plan at all.

The month after the exercise

Preparedness decays quietly. Phone numbers change. A child moves to another school. Someone's medication or mobility needs change. A trusted neighbor moves away. Supplies reach the end of their useful life. The plan should have an ordinary occasion for review, such as the start of a school term or a recurring household task.

The review can be brief. Ask whether the contacts still agree to their roles, whether the information remains accessible, and whether the household can still carry out its routes and arrangements. Update what changed. Repeating an entire elaborate exercise is less important than maintaining the details that make action possible.

For a small business, use a similar review for the essential service and its substitute. If the person with authority is absent, who can decide? If a primary location is unavailable, what work can safely proceed elsewhere? A regional earthquake can test many such arrangements simultaneously. The time to discover an unowned decision is before the event.

This maintenance is easy to miss in a story built around a spectacular rupture. Yet it is where a plan becomes a continuing relationship between people. The coast's geological history supplies a reason to prepare. The calendar of ordinary life determines whether the preparations remain useful.

Coming back

For someone who has left a coastal zone, the urge to return can become strong as soon as the first visible wave has passed. Washington's tsunami guidance warns that hazardous waves and currents can continue. Follow the official all-clear. A photograph of a quiet beach cannot settle the question. Washington DNR

Coming home may be slower than leaving. Housing, water, transport, work, and school can recover at different rates. Keep temporary arrangements in the plan alongside the first minutes of response. A plan that ends at the emergency bag leaves out much of what displacement asks of people.

The 24-card companion deck moves from shaking to evacuation, communications, accessibility, and recovery. Its exercises are hypothetical and its scientific anchor is historical. Sources were checked on November 16, 2026. This book provides general preparedness reading. A location-specific evacuation decision requires current official maps and instructions for that location.